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TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,

SHORT SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY OF THE AUTHOR'S FAMILY,

AND ALSO OF HIS LIFE;

By CHARLES NALSON COLE, Esq.

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A

VIEW

OF THE

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Almoſt thou perſuadeſt me to be a Chriſtian.
Acts xxvi. 28.

A

VIEW, &c.

MOST of the writers, who have undertaken to prove the divine origin of the Chriſtian Religion, have had recourſe to arguments drawn from theſe three heads: the prophecies ſtill extant in the Old Teſtament—the miracles recorded in the New—or, the internal evidence ariſing from that excellence, and thoſe clear marks of ſupernatural interpoſition, which are ſo conſpicuous in the religion itſelf. The two former have been ſufficiently explained and enforced by the ableſt pens; but the laſt, which ſeems to carry with it the greateſt degree of conviction, has never, I think, been conſidered with that attention, which it deſerves.

I mean not here to depreciate the proofs ariſing from either prophecies, or miracles: they both have, or ought to have, their pro-

per weight; prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify; such are those to be found in various parts of the scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued, all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or poste-

rior

rior application, or can entertain the leaſt doubt of their being derived from ſupernatural inſpiration.

The miracles recorded in the New Teſtament to have been performed by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, were certainly convincing proofs of their divine commiſſion to thoſe who ſaw them; and as they were ſeen by ſuch numbers, and are as well atteſted, as other hiſtorical facts, and above all, as they were wrought on ſo great and ſo wonderful an occaſion, they muſt ſtill be admitted as evidence of no inconſiderable force; but, I think, they muſt now depend for much of their credibility on the truth of that religion, whoſe credibility they were at firſt intended to ſupport. To prove therefore the truth of the Chriſtian Religion, we ſhould begin by ſhewing the internal marks of divinity, which are ſtamped upon it; becauſe on this the credibility of the prophecies and miracles in a great meaſure depends: for if we have once reaſon to be convinced, that this religion is derived from a ſuperna-

tural origin, prophecies and miracles will become ſo far from being incredible, that it will be highly probable, that a ſupernatural revelation ſhould be foretold, and enforced by ſupernatural means.

What pure Chriſtianity is, diveſted of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I pretend not to ſay; but what it is not, I will venture to affirm, which is, that it is not the offſpring of fraud or fiction: ſuch, on a ſuperficial view, I know it muſt appear to every man of good ſenſe, whoſe ſenſe has been altogether employed on other ſubjects; but if any one will give himſelf the trouble to examine it with accuracy and candor, he will plainly ſee, that however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, yet it never could have been grafted on the ſame ſtock, nor planted by the ſame hand.

To aſcertain the true ſyſtem, and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the undecided controverſies of above ſeventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbiſh, which artifice and ignorance have been heaping upon it during

during all that time, would indeed be an arduous taſk, which I ſhall by no means undertake; but to ſhew, that it cannot poſſibly be derived from human wiſdom, or human impoſture, is a work, I think, attended with no great difficulty, and requiring no extraordinary abilities, and therefore I ſhall attempt that, and that alone, by ſtating, and then explaining the following plain and undeniable propoſitions.

Firſt, That there is now extant a book intitled the New Teſtament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a ſyſtem of religion intirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely ſuperior to, but unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewiſe be collected a ſyſtem of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reaſon is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wiſeſt philoſophers of preceding ages; every moral pre-

cept founded on falſe principles is totally omitted, and many new precepts added peculiarly correſponding with the new object of this religion.

Laſtly, That ſuch a ſyſtem of religion and morality could not poſſibly have been the work of any man, or ſet of men; much leſs of thoſe obſcure, ignorant, and illiterate perſons, who actually did diſcover, and publiſh it to the world; and that therefore it muſt undoubtedly have been effected by the interpoſition of divine power, that is, that it muſt derive its origin from God.

PRO-

PROPOSITION I.

VERY little need be ſaid to eſtabliſh my firſt propoſition, which is ſingly this: That there is now extant a book intitled the New Teſtament; that is, there is a collection of writings diſtinguiſhed by that denomination, containing four hiſtorical accounts of the birth, life, actions, diſcourſes, and death of an extraordinary perſon named Jeſus Chriſt, who was born in the reign of Auguſtus Cæſar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judæa, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Alſo one other hiſtorical account of the travels, tranſactions, and orations of ſome mean and illiterate men, known by the title of his apoſtles, whom he commiſſioned to propagate his religion after his death; which he foretold them he muſt ſuffer in confirmation of its truth. To theſe are added ſeveral epiſtolary writings, addreſſed

addreſſed by theſe perſons to their fellow-labourers in this work, or to the ſeveral churches or ſocieties of Chriſtians, which they had eſtabliſhed in the ſeveral cities through which they had paſſed.

It would not be difficult to prove, that theſe books were written ſoon after thoſe extraordinary events, which are the ſubjects of them; as we find them quoted, and referred to by an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of writers from thoſe to the preſent times: nor would it be leſs eaſy to ſhew, that the truth of all thoſe events, miracles only excepted, can no more be reaſonably queſtioned, than the truth of any other facts recorded in any hiſtory whatever: as there can be no more reaſon to doubt, that there exiſted ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt, ſpeaking, acting, and ſuffering in ſuch a manner as is there deſcribed, than that there were ſuch men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his cotemporaries; or to ſuſpect, that Peter, Paul, and James were not the authors of thoſe epiſtles, to which their names are affixed, than

than that Cicero and Pliny did not write thoſe which are aſcribed to them. It might alſo be made appear, that theſe books having been wrote by various perſons at different times, and in diſtant places, could not poſſibly have been the work of a ſingle impoſtor, nor of a fraudulent combination, being all ſtamped with the ſame marks of an uniform originality in their very frame and compoſition.

But all theſe circumſtances I ſhall paſs over unobſerved, as they do not fall in with the courſe of my argument, nor are neceſſary for the ſupport of it. Whether theſe books were wrote by the authors whoſe names are prefixed to them, whether they have been enlarged, diminiſhed, or any way corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of tranſlators or tranſcribers; whether in the hiſtorical parts the writers were inſtructed by a perpetual, a partial, or by any inſpiration at all; whether in the religious and moral parts, they received their doctrines from a divine influence, or from the inſtructions

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and converſation of their maſter; whether in their facts or ſentiments there is always the moſt exact agreement, or whether in both they ſometimes differ from each other; whether they are in any caſe miſtaken, or always infallible; or ever pretended to be ſo, I ſhall not here diſpute: let the Deiſt avail himſelf of all theſe doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity to his own opinions, I ſhall not contend, becauſe they affect not my argument: all that I aſſert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that ſuch writings do now exiſt.

PRO-

PROPOSITION II.

MY ſecond propoſition is not quite ſo ſimple, but, I think, not leſs undeniable than the former, and is this: That from this book may be extracted a ſyſtem of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object, and the doctrines, not only infinitely ſuperior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man: I ſay extracted, becauſe all the doctrines of this religion having been delivered at various times, and on various occaſions, and here only hiſtorically recorded, no uniform or regular ſyſtem of theology is here to be found; and better perhaps it had been, if leſs labour had been employed by the learned, to bend and twiſt theſe divine materials into the poliſhed forms of human ſyſtems, to which they never will ſubmit, and for which they were never intended by their great author. Why he choſe not to leave

any ſuch behind him we know not, but it might poſſibly be, becauſe he knew, that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving ſuch a ſyſtem, and that we are more properly, and more ſafely conducted by the diſtant and ſcattered rays, than by the too powerful ſunſhine of divine illumination: "If I have told you earthly things," ſays he, "and ye believe not, how ſhall ye believe "if I tell you of heavenly things*?" that is, If my inſtructions concerning your behaviour in the preſent, as relative to a future life, are ſo difficult to be underſtood, that you can ſcarcely believe me, how ſhall you believe, if I endeavour to explain to you the nature of celeſtial beings, the deſigns of Providence, and the myſteries of his diſpenſations; ſubjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to expreſs?

Firſt then, the object of this religion is entirely new, and is this; to prepare us by a

* John iii. 12.

ſtate

ſtate of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is every where profeſſed by Chriſt and his apoſtles to be the chief end of the Chriſtian's life; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harveſt which is to pay him for all his labours: Yet previous to their preaching no ſuch prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means preſcribed for the attainment of it.

It is indeed true, that ſome of the philoſophers of antiquity entertained notions of a future ſtate, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty: their legiſlators alſo endeavoured to infuſe into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and puniſhments after death; but by this they only intended to give a ſanction to their laws, and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of mankind in the preſent life: this alone ſeems to have been their end, and a meritorious end it was; but Chriſtianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler deſign in view, which is, by a proper education

education here to render us fit members of a celeſtial ſociety hereafter. In all former religions the good of the preſent life was the firſt object; in the Chriſtian it is but the ſecond; in thoſe, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward; in this, the practice of virtue is injoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in theſe two plans, that is, in adhering to virtue from its preſent utility in expectation of future happineſs, and living in ſuch a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance and enjoyment of that happineſs; and the conduct and diſpoſitions of thoſe, who act on theſe different principles, muſt be no leſs different: on the firſt, the conſtant practice of juſtice, temperance, and ſobriety, will be ſufficient; but on the latter, we muſt add to theſe an habitual piety, faith, reſignation, and contempt of the world: the firſt may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable Chriſtian. Hence it is that Chriſtianity inſiſts more ſtrongly, than any preceding

preceding inſtitution religious or moral, on purity of heart and a benevolent diſpoſition; becauſe theſe are abſolutely neceſſary to its great end; but in thoſe whoſe recommendations of virtue regard the preſent life only, and whoſe promiſed rewards in another were low and ſenſual, no preparatory qualifications were requiſite to enable men to practiſe the one, or to enjoy the other: and therefore we ſee this object is peculiar to this religion; and with it was entirely new.

But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded were new, and perhaps undiſcoverable by reaſon, yet when diſcovered they are ſo conſonant to it, that we cannot but readily aſſent to them. For the truth of this principle, that the preſent life is a ſtate of probation, and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we ſee around us: it is the only key which can open to us the deſigns of Providence in the œconomy of human affairs, the only clue, which can guide us through that pathleſs wilderneſs, and the

only plan on which this world could poſſibly have been formed, or on which the hiſtory of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happineſs: becauſe it is every where overſpread with innumerable miſeries; nor of miſery, becauſe it is interſperſed with many enjoyments: it could not have been conſtituted for a ſcene of wiſdom and virtue, becauſe the hiſtory of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedneſs: nor of vice, becauſe that is no plan at all, being deſtructive of all exiſtence, and conſequently of its own. But on this ſyſtem all that we here meet with, may be eaſily accounted for; for this mixture of happineſs and miſery, of virtue and vice, neceſſarily reſults from a ſtate of probation and education; as probation implies trials, ſufferings, and a capacity of offending, and education a propriety of chaſtiſement for thoſe offences.

In the next place, the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God, and of man, of the preſent,

ſent, and of a future life; and of the relations which all theſe bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite diſſimilar from any which had ever been thought on, previous to its publication. No other ever drew ſo juſt a portrait of the worthleſſneſs of this world, and all its purſuits, nor exhibited ſuch diſtinct, lively, and exquiſite pictures of the joys of another; of the reſurrection of the dead, the laſt judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, "when this corruptible ſhall put on incor-"ruption, and this mortal ſhall put on im-"mortality*." No other has ever repreſented the Supreme Being in the character of three perſons united in one God†.

* 1 Cor. xv. 53.

† That there ſubſiſts ſome ſuch union in the divine nature, the whole tenour of the New Teſtament ſeems to expreſs, and it was ſo underſtood in the earlieſt ages: but whether this union does, or does not imply equality, or whether it ſubſiſts in general, or only in particular circumſtances, we are not informed, and therefore on theſe queſtions it is not only unneceſſary, but improper for us to decide.

No other has attempted to reconcile thoſe ſeeming contradictory but both true propoſitions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God, or the free will of the creature with the over-ruling grace of the Creator. No other has ſo fully declared the neceſſity of wickedneſs and puniſhment, yet ſo effectually inſtructed individuals to reſiſt the one, and to eſcape the other: no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it: no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of ſin without the influence of a mediatorial interpoſition, and a vicarious atonement from the ſufferings of a ſuperior being*. Whether theſe wonderful doctrines

* That Chriſt ſuffered and died as an atonement for the ſins of mankind, is a doctrine ſo conſtantly and ſo ſtrongly enforced through every part of the New Teſtament, that whoever will ſeriouſly peruſe thoſe writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reaſon and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, aſſert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the hiſtories of Greece and Rome.

are

are worthy of our belief muſt depend on the opinion, which we entertain of the authority of thoſe, who publiſhed them to the world; but certain it is, that they are all ſo far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it ſeems equally impoſſible, that they ſhould ever have been derived from the knowledge or the artifice of man.

Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the eſtabliſhed ſignification of words, (which they call explaining) have ventured to expunge all theſe doctrines out of the ſcriptures, for no other reaſon than that they are not able to comprehend them; and argue thus:—The ſcriptures are the word of God; in his word no propoſitions contradictory to reaſon can have a place; theſe propoſitions are contradictory to reaſon, and therefore they are not there. But if theſe bold aſſertors would claim any regard, they ſhould reverſe their argument, and ſay,—Theſe doctrines make a part, and a material part of the ſcriptures, they are contradictory to reaſon; no propoſitions contradictory to

reaſon can be a part of the word of God, and therefore neither the ſcriptures, nor the pretended revelation contained in them, can be derived from him: This would be an argument worthy of rational and candid Deiſts, and demand a reſpectful attention; but when men pretend to diſprove facts by reaſoning, they have no right to expect an anſwer.

And here I cannot omit obſerving, that the perſonal character of the author of this religion is no leſs new, and extraordinary, than the religion itſelf, who "ſpake as never "man ſpake*," and lived as never man lived: in proof of this, I do not mean to alledge, that he was born of a virgin, that he faſted forty days, that he performed a variety of miracles, and after being buried three days, that he aroſe from the dead; becauſe theſe accounts will have but little effect on the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to

* John vii. 46.

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the relation of theſe facts; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be diſputed; for inſtance, he is the only founder of a religion in the hiſtory of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally unconducive to any worldly purpoſe whatever: all others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moſes himſelf, blended their religious inſtitutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their reſpective people; but Chriſt neither aimed at, nor would accept of any ſuch power; he rejected every object, which all other men purſue, and made choice of all thoſe which others fly from, and are afraid of: he refuſed power, riches, honours, and pleaſure, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthuſiaſts and impoſtors, who have endeavoured to impoſe on the world pretended revelations, and ſome of them from pride, obſtinacy, or principle, have gone ſo far, as to lay down their lives, rather than retract; but I defy hiſtory to ſhew one, who ever

made his own ſufferings and death a neceſſary part of his original plan, and eſſential to his miſſion; this Chriſt actually did, he foreſaw, foretold, declared, their neceſſity, and voluntarily endured them. If we ſeriouſly contemplate the divine leſſons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful diſcourſes, and the conſiſtent conduct of this wonderful perſon, we cannot poſſibly imagine, that he could have been either an idiot or a madman; and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be conſidered in no other light; and even under this character he would deſerve ſome attention, becauſe of ſo ſublime and rational an inſanity there is no other inſtance in the hiſtory of mankind.

If any one can doubt of the ſuperior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruſe with attention thoſe unparalleled writings in which it is tranſmitted to the preſent times, and compare them with the moſt celebrated productions of the pagan world; and if he is not ſenſible of their ſuperior beauty, ſimplicity,

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and originality, I will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taſte as in faith, and that he is as bad a critic as a Chriſtian: for in what ſchool of ancient philoſophy can he find a leſſon of morality ſo perfect as Chriſt's ſermon on the mount? From which of them can he collect an addreſs to the Deity ſo conciſe, and yet ſo comprehenſive, ſo expreſſive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that ſhort prayer, which he formed for, and recommended to his diſciples? From the works of what ſage of antiquity can he produce ſo pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the diſtreſſed, and enforced by ſuch aſſurances of a reward, as in thoſe words of Chriſt? "Come, ye "bleſſed of my Father! inherit the kingdom "prepared for you from the foundation of "the world: for I was an hungred, and ye "gave me meat; I was thirſty, and ye gave "me drink; I was a ſtranger, and ye took "me in; I was naked, and ye clothed me; "I was ſick, and ye viſited me; I was in "priſon, and ye came unto me. Then ſhall

"the

" the righteous anſwer him, ſaying—Lord,
" when ſaw we thee an hungred, and fed
" thee, or thirſty, and gave thee drink? when
" ſaw we thee a ſtranger, and took thee in,
" or naked, and clothed thee? or when ſaw
" we thee ſick and in priſon, and came unto
" thee? Then ſhall I anſwer and ſay unto
" them,—Verily I ſay unto you, inaſmuch
" as you have done it to the leaſt of theſe
" my brethren, ye have done it unto me*."
Where is there ſo juſt, and ſo elegant a reproof of eagerneſs and anxiety in worldly purſuits, cloſed with ſo forcible an exhortation to confidence in the goodneſs of our Creator, as in theſe words?—" Behold the fowls of the air;
" for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor
" gather into barns, yet your heavenly Fa-
" ther feedeth them. Are ye not much bet-
" ter than they? Conſider the lilies of the
" field, how they grow; they toil not, nei-
" ther do they ſpin; and yet I ſay unto you,
" that even Solomon in all his glory was not

* Matt. xxv. 34.

" arrayed

" arrayed like one of theſe: wherefore, if " God ſo clothe the graſs of the field, which " to-day is, and to-morrow is caſt into the " oven, ſhall he not much more clothe you? " O ye of little faith *!" By which of their moſt celebrated poets are the joys reſerved for the righteous in a future ſtate, ſo ſublimely deſcribed, as by this ſhort declaration, that they are ſuperior to all deſcription? " Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither " have entered into the heart of man, the " things, which God hath prepared for them " that love him†." Where amidſt the dark clouds of pagan philoſophy can he ſhew us ſuch a clear proſpect of a future ſtate, the immortality of the ſoul, the reſurrection of the dead, and the general judgment, as in St. Paul's firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians? Or from whence can he produce ſuch cogent exhortations to the practice of every virtue, ſuch ardent incitements to piety and devotion, and ſuch aſſiſtances to attain them,

* Matt. vi. 26, 28. † 1 Cor. ii. 9.

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as thoſe which are to be met with throughout every page of theſe inimitable writings? To quote all the paſſages in them relative to theſe ſubjects, would be almoſt to tranſcribe the whole; it is ſufficient to obſerve, that they are every where ſtamped with ſuch apparent marks of ſupernatural aſſiſtance, as render them indiſputably ſuperior to, and totally unlike all human compoſitions whatever; and this ſuperiority and diſſimilarity is ſtill more ſtrongly marked by one remarkable circumſtance peculiar to themſelves, which is, that whilſt the moral parts, being of the moſt general uſe, are intelligible to the meaneſt capacities, the learned and inquiſitive throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhauſtible diſcoveries, concerning the nature, attributes, and diſpenſations of Providence.

To ſay the truth, before the appearance of Chriſtianity there exiſted nothing like religion on the face of the earth; the Jewiſh only excepted: all other nations were immerſed in the groſſeſt idolatry, which had little

little or no connection with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous examples of their imaginary deities: they all worſhipped a multiplicity of gods and dæmons, whoſe favour they courted by impious, obſcene, and ridiculous ceremonies, and whoſe anger they endeavoured to appeaſe by the moſt abominable cruelties. In the politeſt ages of the politeſt nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory, poetry, hiſtory, architecture, and ſculpture to the higheſt perfection, and made no inconſiderable advances in thoſe of mathematics, natural, and even moral philoſophy, in religious knowledge they had made none at all; a ſtrong preſumption, that the nobleſt efforts of the mind of man, unaſſiſted by revelation, were unequal to the taſk. Some few indeed of their philoſophers were wiſe enough to reject theſe general abſurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight: Plato introduced many ſublime ideas of nature, and its firſt cauſe, and of the immortality of the ſoul, which being above his own and all

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human diſcovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moſes or the converſation of ſome Jewiſh rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he reſided, and ſtudied for ſeveral years: from him Ariſtotle, and from both Cicero and ſome few others drew moſt amazing ſtores of philoſophical ſcience, and carried their reſearches into divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But theſe were bright conſtellations, which appeared ſingly in ſeveral centuries, and even theſe with all this knowledge were very deficient in true theology. From the viſible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man they little underſtood; of piety and devotion they had ſcarce any ſenſe, nor could they form any mode of worſhip worthy of the purity and perfection of the divine nature: they occaſionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty, and excellence of virtue: but they founded it not

on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happineſs of heaven as its reward, or its object. They ſometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongſt the gods; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms: for with them heaven was open only to legiſlators, and conquerors, the civilizers, or deſtroyers of mankind. This was then the ſummit of religion in the moſt poliſhed nations in the world, and even this was confined to a few philoſophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little attended to, and leſs underſtood by the generality of mankind in their own countries; whilſt all the reſt were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and ſuperſtition.

At this time Chriſtianity broke forth from the eaſt like a riſing ſun, and diſpelled this univerſal darkneſs, which obſcured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all thoſe remoter regions, to which its

its ſalutary influence has not as yet extended. From all thoſe which it has reached, it has notwithſtanding its corruptions, baniſhed all thoſe enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and purer morals: it has taught men the unity, and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remiſſion of ſins, the reſurrection of the dead, life everlaſting, and the kingdom of heaven; doctrines as inconceivable to the wiſeſt of mankind, antecedent to its appearance, as the Newtonian ſyſtem is at this day to the moſt ignorant tribes of ſavages in the wilds of America; doctrines, which human reaſon never could have diſcovered, but which when diſcovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of Plato, Ariſtotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peaſant and mechanic with the bible in his hand. Theſe are all plain facts too glaring to be contradicted, and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of

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these books, the relations which they contain, or the inspiration of their authors, of these facts no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt; because there are the books, and in them is this religion.

PROPOSITION III.

MY third propoſition is this; That from this book called the New Teſtament, may be collected a ſyſtem of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reaſon is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the antient philoſophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on falſe principles is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly correſponding with the new object of this religion.

By moral precepts founded on reaſon, I mean all thoſe, which enforce the practice of ſuch duties as reaſon informs us muſt improve our natures, and conduce to the happineſs of mankind: ſuch are piety to God, benevolence to men, juſtice, charity, temperance, and ſobriety, with all thoſe, which prohibit the commiſſion of the contrary vices, all which debaſe our natures, and, by mutual injuries,

injuries, introduce univerſal diſorder, and conſequently univerſal miſery. By precepts founded on falſe principles, I mean thoſe which recommend fictitious virtues productive of none of theſe ſalutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all; ſuch are valour, patriotiſm, and friendſhip.

That virtues of the firſt kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Chriſtian religion than by any other, it is here unneceſſary to prove, becauſe this is a truth, which has been frequently demonſtrated by her friends, and never once denied by the moſt determined of her adverſaries; but it will be proper to ſhew, that thoſe of the latter ſort are moſt judiciouſly omitted; becauſe they have really no intrinſic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and ſpirit of this inſtitution.

Valour, for inſtance, or active courage, is for the moſt part conſtitutional, and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit, than wit, beauty, health, ſtrength, or any

other endowment of the mind or body; and so far is it from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happiness into society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences, which from retaliated injuries distract the world with bloodshed and devastation. It is the engine by which the strong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppress the innocent; it is the chief instrument which Ambition employs in her unjust pursuits of wealth and power, and is therefore so much extolled by her votaries: it was indeed congenial with the religion of pagans, whose gods were for the most part made out of deceased heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the mischiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth, and therefore with them this was the first of virtues, and had even engrossed that denomination to itself; but whatever merit it may have assumed among pagans, with Christians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occasions in which they are permitted

permitted to exert it: they are ſo far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to reſiſt it: they are ſo far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their firſt duties is to forgive them; ſo far from being incited to deſtroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and to ſerve them to the utmoſt of their power. If Chriſtian nations therefore were nations of Chriſtians, all war would be impoſſible and unknown amongſt them, and valour could be neither of uſe nor eſtimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of Chriſtian virtues, being irreconcileable with all its precepts. I object not to the praiſe and honours beſtowed on the valiant, they are the leaſt tribute which can be paid them by thoſe who enjoy ſafety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and ſufferings: I aſſert only that active courage can never be a Chriſtian virtue, becauſe a Chriſtian can have nothing to do with it. Paſſive courage is indeed frequently, and properly inculcated by this

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meek and ſuffering religion, under the titles of patience and reſignation: a real and ſubſtantial virtue this, and a direct contraſt to the former; for paſſive courage ariſes from the nobleſt diſpoſitions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty; active, from the meaneſt; from paſſion, vanity, and ſelf-dependence: paſſive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perſeverance in duty; active, is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injuſtice: in ſhort, paſſive courage is the reſolution of a philoſopher; active, the ferocity of a ſavage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven; for valour is not that ſort of violence, by which that kingdom is to be taken; nor are the turbulent ſpirits of heroes and conquerors admiſſible into thoſe regions of peace, ſubordination, and tranquillity.

Patriotiſm alſo, that celebrated virtue ſo much

much practiſed in antient, and ſo much profeſſed in modern times, that virtue, which ſo long preſerved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world: this celebrated virtue, I ſay, muſt alſo be excluded; becauſe it not only falls ſhort of, but directly counteracts, the extenſive benevolence of this religion. A Chriſtian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world; and his neighbours and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remoteſt regions, whenever their diſtreſſes demand his friendly aſſiſtance: Chriſtianity commands us to love all mankind, patriotiſm to oppreſs all other countries to advance the imaginary proſperity of our own: Chriſtianity enjoins us to imitate the univerſal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his bleſſings on every nation upon earth; patriotiſm, to copy the mean partiality of an Engliſh pariſh officer, who thinks injuſtice and cruelty meritorious, whenever they promote the intereſts of his own inconſiderable village. This has ever been a favourite virtue with man-

kind, becauſe it conceals ſelf-intereſt under the maſk of public ſpirit, not only from others, but even from themſelves, and gives a licence to inflict wrongs and injuries not only with impunity, but with applauſe; but it is ſo diametrically oppoſite to the great characteriſtic of this inſtitution, that it never could have been admitted into the liſt of Chriſtian virtues.

Friendſhip likewiſe, although more congenial to the principles of Chriſtianity, ariſing from more tender and amiable diſpoſitions, could never gain admittance amongſt her benevolent precepts, for the ſame reaſon; becauſe it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a ſingle object, which is here commanded to be extended over all. Where friendſhips ariſe from ſimilarity of ſentiments, and diſintereſted affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pretenſions to merit; for it is juſtly obſerved, "If ye love them, which love you, what "thanks have ye? for ſinners alſo love thoſe,

" that love them *." But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and intereſts, or from a participation of vices, the uſual parents of what are called friendſhips among mankind, they are then both miſchievous and criminal, and conſequently forbidden; but in their utmoſt purity deſerve no recommendation from this religion.

To the judicious omiſſion of theſe falſe virtues we may add that remarkable ſilence, which the Chriſtian legiſlator every where preſerves on ſubjects eſteemed by all others of the higheſt importance, civil government, national policy, and the rights of war and peace; of theſe he has not taken the leaſt notice, probably for this plain reaſon, becauſe it would have been impoſſible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which muſt not have been inconſiſtent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical obſervance of ſuch imperfect crea-

* Luke vi. 32.

tures

tures as men ruling over, and contending with each other: for inſtance, had he abſolutely forbid all reſiſtance to the reigning powers, he had conſtituted a plan of deſpotiſm, and made men ſlaves; had he allowed it, he muſt have authoriſed diſobedience, and made them rebels: had he in direct terms prohibited all war, he muſt have left his followers for ever an eaſy prey to every infidel invader; had he permitted it, he muſt have licenſed all that rapine and murder, with which it is unavoidably attended.

Let us now examine what are thoſe new precepts in this religion peculiarly correſponding with the new object of it, that is, preparing us for the kingdom of heaven: of theſe the chief are poorneſs of ſpirit, forgiveneſs of injuries, and charity to all men; to theſe we may add repentance, faith, ſelf-abaſement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and abſolutely neceſſary to the attainment of its end.

" Bleſſed

" Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit ; for theirs " is the kingdom of heaven*:" by which poorneſs of ſpirit is to be underſtood a diſpoſition of mind, meek, humble, ſubmiſſive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all reſentment. This was ſo new, and ſo oppoſite to the ideas of all pagan moraliſts, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanneſs, which muſt induce men to ſacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honour, to a ſhameful puſillanimity ; and ſuch it appears to almoſt all who are called Chriſtians even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but diſavow it in principle, notwithſtanding this explicit declaration of their maſter. We ſee them revenging the ſmalleſt affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honour ; and, in their national capacities, deſtroying each other with fire and ſword, for the low conſiderations of commercial intereſts, the balance of

* Matt. v. 3.

rival

rival powers, or the ambition of princes: we ſee them with their laſt breath animating each other to a ſavage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents: and, what is ſtill worſe, we hear all theſe barbariſms celebrated by hiſtorians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in ſenates, and even ſanctified in pulpits. But univerſal practice cannot alter the nature of things, nor univerſal error change the nature of truth: pride was not made for man; but humility, meekneſs, and reſignation, that is poorneſs of ſpirit, was made for man; and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious ſituation; and is the only diſpoſition of mind, which can enable him to enjoy eaſe and quiet here, and happineſs hereafter: yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him, who ſaid, "Suffer little children to "come unto me, and forbid them not; for "of ſuch is the kingdom of heaven: Verily "I ſay unto you, whoever ſhall not receive

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" the kingdom of God as a little child, he " ſhall not enter therein *."

Another precept, equally new and no leſs excellent, is forgiveneſs of injuries: " Ye " have heard," ſays Chriſt to his diſciples, " Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour, and hate " thine enemy; but I ſay unto you, love " your enemies; bleſs them that curſe you, do " good to them that hate you, and pray for " them which deſpitefully uſe you, and per- " ſecute you †." This was a leſſon ſo new, and ſo utterly unknown, till taught by his doctrines, and enforced by his example, that the wiſeſt moraliſts of the wiſeſt nations and ages repreſented the deſire of revenge as a mark of a noble mind, and the accompliſhment of it as one of the chief felicities attendant on a fortunate man. But how much more magnanimous, how much more beneficial to mankind, is forgiveneſs! it is more magnanimous, becauſe every generous and exalted diſpoſition of the human mind is re-

* Matt. x. 14. † Matt. v. 43.

quiſite

quiſite to the practice of it: for theſe alone can enable us to bear the wrongs and inſults of wickedneſs and folly with patience, and to look down on the perpetrators of them with pity, rather than indignation; theſe alone can teach us, that ſuch are but a part of thoſe ſufferings allotted to us in this ſtate of probation, and to know, that to overcome evil with good, is the moſt glorious of all victories: it is the moſt beneficial, becauſe this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal ſucceſſion of injuries and retaliations; for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for ſatisfaction. But would we obſerve this ſalutary precept, to love our enemies, and to do good to thoſe who deſpitefully uſe us, this obſtinate benevolence would at laſt conquer the moſt inveterate hearts, and we ſhould have no enemies to forgive. How much more exalted a character therefore is a Chriſtian martyr, ſuffering with reſignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero, breathing revenge, and deſtroying the innocent!

innocent! Yet, noble and uſeful as this virtue is, before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractiſed, but decried in principle as mean and ignominious, though ſo obvious a remedy for moſt of the miſeries of this life, and ſo neceſſary a qualification for the happineſs of another.

A third precept, firſt noticed and firſt enjoined by this inſtitution, is charity to all men. What this is, we may beſt learn from this admirable deſcription, painted in the following words: "Charity ſuffereth long, "and is kind; charity envieth not; charity "vaunteth not itſelf; is not puffed up; doth "not behave itſelf unſeemly; ſeeketh not "her own; is not eaſily provoked; think-"eth no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but "rejoiceth in truth; feareth all things; be-"lieveth all things; hopeth all things; en-"dureth all things*." Here we have an accurate delineation of this bright conſtellation of all virtues; which conſiſts not, as

* 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

many

many imagine, in the building of monaſteries, endowment of hoſpitals, or the diſtribution of alms; but in ſuch an amiable diſpoſition of mind, as exerciſes itſelf every hour in acts of kindneſs, patience, complacency, and benevolence to all around us, and which alone is able to promote happineſs in the preſent life, or render us capable of receiving it in another: and yet this is totally new, and ſo it is declared to be by the author of it: "A new commandment I "give unto you, that ye love one another; "as I have loved you, that ye love one ano-"ther; by this ſhall all men know that ye "are my diſciples, if ye have love one to "another *." This benevolent diſpoſition is made the great characteriſtic of a Chriſtian, the teſt of his obedience, and the mark by which he is to be diſtinguiſhed. This love for each other is that charity juſt now deſcribed, and contains all thoſe qualities, which are there attributed to it; humility,

* John xiii. 34.

patience,

patience, meekneſs, and beneficence: without which we muſt live in perpetual diſcord, and conſequently cannot pay obedience to this commandment by loving one another; a commandment ſo ſublime, ſo rational, and ſo beneficial, ſo wiſely calculated to correct the depravity, diminiſh the wickedneſs, and abate the miſeries of human nature, that, did we univerſally comply with it, we ſhould ſoon be relieved from all the inquietudes ariſing from our own unruly paſſions, anger, envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well as from all thoſe injuries to which we are perpetually expoſed from the indulgence of the ſame paſſions in others. It would alſo preſerve our minds in ſuch a ſtate of tranquillity, and ſo prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we ſhould ſlide out of a life of peace, love, and benevolence, into that celeſtial ſociety, by an almoſt imperceptible tranſition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who ſo intitles it, and has made it the capital duty of his religion, becauſe the moſt indiſpenſa-

bly neceſſary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven; into which if proud, turbulent, and vindictive ſpirits were permitted to enter, they muſt unavoidably deſtroy the happineſs of that ſtate by the operations of the ſame paſſions and vices, by which they diſturb the preſent; and therefore all ſuch muſt be eternally excluded, not only as a puniſhment, but alſo from incapacity.

Repentance, by this we plainly ſee, is another new moral duty ſtrenuouſly inſiſted on by this religion, and by no other, becauſe abſolutely neceſſary to the accompliſhment of its end; for this alone can purge us from thoſe tranſgreſſions, from which we cannot be totally exempted in this ſtate of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature, which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence alſo we may learn, that no repentance can remove this incapacity, but ſuch as entirely changes the nature and diſpoſition of the offender; which in the language of ſcripture is called "being born again." Mere contrition for

paſt crimes, nor even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unleſs it operates to this entire converſion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named: for ſorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can reſtore health to a body diſtempered by a long courſe of vice and intemperance. Hence alſo every one, who is in the leaſt acquainted with himſelf, may judge of the reaſonableneſs of the hope that is in him, and of his ſituation in a future ſtate by that of his preſent. If he feels in himſelf a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleaſures or buſineſs of the world, he may be aſſured, that he muſt be excluded from the kingdom of heaven; not only becauſe his conduct can merit no ſuch reward, but becauſe, if admitted, he would find there no objects ſatisfactory to his paſſions, inclinations, and purſuits, and therefore could only diſturb the happineſs of others without enjoying any ſhare of it himſelf.

Faith is another moral duty injoined by this inſtitution, of a ſpecies ſo new, that the philoſophers of antiquity had no word expreſſive of this idea, nor any ſuch idea to be expreſſed; for the word πιστις or *fides*, which we tranſlate faith, was never uſed by any pagan writer in a ſenſe the leaſt ſimilar to that, to which it is applied in the New Teſtament: where in general it ſignifies an humble, teachable, and candid diſpoſition, a truſt in God, and confidence in his promiſes; when applied particularly to Chriſtianity, it means no more than a belief of this ſingle propoſition, That Chriſt was the ſon of God; that is, in the language of thoſe writings, the Meſſiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews; who was ſent by God into the world to preach righteouſneſs, judgment, and everlaſting life, and to die as an atonement for the ſins of mankind. This was all that Chriſt required to be believed by thoſe who were willing to become his diſciples: he, who does not believe this, is not a Chriſtian, and he who does, believes the whole

whole that is eſſential to his profeſſion, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been ſo tortured and ſo miſapplied to mean every abſurdity, which artifice could impoſe upon ignorance, that it has loſt all pretenſions to the title of virtue; but if brought back to the ſimplicity of its original ſignification, it well deſerves that name, becauſe it uſually ariſes from the moſt amiable diſpoſitions, and is always a direct contraſt to pride, obſtinacy, and ſelf-conceit. If taken in the extenſive ſenſe of an aſſent to the evidence of things not ſeen, it comprehends the exiſtence of a God, and a future ſtate, and is therefore not only itſelf a moral virtue, but the ſource from whence all others muſt proceed; for on the belief of theſe all religion and morality muſt entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of moral merit, (as ſome would repreſent it) becauſe it is in a degree voluntary; for daily experience ſhews us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and diſbe-

lieve, almoſt any propoſitions, which beſt ſuit their intereſts, or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their ſincere opinions with their ſituations and circumſtances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's, to ſhut it againſt the ſtrongeſt rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of ſcepticiſm and infidelity when we "love darkneſs rather than "light, becauſe our deeds are evil *." And this, I think, ſufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the ſuppoſition of its being quite involuntary, and neceſſarily dependent on the degree of evidence, which is offered to our underſtandings.

Self-abaſement is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to the grace and favour of our Creator, and to acknowledge, that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unleſs aſſiſted by his

* John iii. 19.

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over-ruling influence. This doctrine seems at first sight to infringe on our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit; but, on a closer examination, the truth of it may be demonstrated both by reason and experience, and that in fact it does not impair the one, or depreciate the other: and that it is productive of so much humility, resignation, and dependance on God, that it justly claims a place amongst the most illustrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and self-sufficient principles of the antient philosophers as well as modern Deists, and therefore before the publication of the gospel totally unknown and uncomprehended.

Detachment from the world is another moral virtue constituted by this religion alone: so new, that even at this day few of its professors can be persuaded, that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By this detachment from the world is not to be understood a seclusion from society, abstraction from all business, or retirement to a

gloomy cloyſter. Induſtry and labour, chearfulneſs and hoſpitality are frequently recommended: nor is the acquiſition of wealth and honours prohibited, if they can be obtained by honeſt means, and a moderate degree of attention and care: but ſuch an unremitted anxiety, and perpetual application as engroſſes our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, becauſe they are incompatible with the ſpirit of this religion, and muſt utterly diſqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain purſuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in our harneſs, and then expect, if no gigantic crime ſtands in the way, to ſtep immediately into the kingdom of heaven: but this is impoſſible; for without a previous detachment from the buſineſs of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happineſs of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of pagans, becauſe their virtues were altogether connected with this buſineſs, and conſiſted chiefly in conducting it with honour to themſelves, and benefit to the public: but

Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity has a nobler object in view, which, if not attended to, muſt be loſt for ever. This object is that celeſtial manſion of which we ſhould never loſe ſight, and to which we ſhould be ever advancing during our journey through life: but this by no means precludes us from performing the buſineſs, or enjoying the amuſements of travellers, provided they detain us not too long, or lead us too far out of our way.

It cannot be denied, that the great author of the Chriſtian inſtitution, firſt and ſingly ventured to oppoſe all the chief principles of pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly oppoſite to thoſe erroneous though long-eſtabliſhed opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The moſt celebrated virtues of the ancients were high ſpirit, intrepid courage, and implacable reſentment.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,

was the portrait of the moſt illuſtrious hero, drawn by one of the firſt poets of antiquity. To all theſe admired qualities, thoſe of a true Chriſtian are an exact contraſt; for this

religion

religion conſtantly enjoins poorneſs of ſpirit, meekneſs, patience, and forgiveneſs of injuries. "But I ſay unto you, that ye reſiſt "not evil; but whoever ſhall ſmite thee on "the right cheek, turn to him the other "alſo *." The favourite characters among the Pagans were the turbulent, ambitious, and intrepid, who through toils and dangers acquired wealth, and ſpent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both theſe are equally adverſe to the Chriſtian ſyſtem, which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to ſecure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. "Lay not "up for yourſelves treaſures on earth, &c." "Take no thought, ſaying, what ſhall we "eat, or what ſhall we drink, or wherewithal "ſhall we be cloathed? for after all theſe "things do the Gentiles ſeek †." The chief object of the Pagans was immortal fame: for this their poets ſang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died; and this was hung out by their philoſophers and legiſla-

* Matt. v. 39. † Matt. vi. 31.

tors,

tors, as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what ſays the Chriſtian legiſlator to his diſciples on this ſubject? "Bleſſed are ye, when men ſhall revile you, "and ſhall ſay all manner of evil againſt you "for my ſake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad, "for great is your reward in heaven*." So widely different is the genius of the Pagan and Chriſtian morality, that I will venture to affirm, that the moſt celebrated virtues of the former are more oppoſite to the ſpirit, and more inconſiſtent with the end of the latter, than even their moſt infamous vices; and that a Brutus wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppreſſor of his country, or a Cato murdering himſelf from an impatience of controul, leaves the world more unqualified for, and more inadmiſſible into the kingdom of heaven, than even a Meſſalina, or an Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

Nothing, I believe, has ſo much contri-

* Matt. v. 11.

buted

buted to corrupt the true ſpirit of the Chriſtian inſtitution, as that partiality, which we contract from our earlieſt education for the manners of pagan antiquity: from whence we learn to adopt every moral idea, which is repugnant to it; to applaud falſe virtues, which that diſavows; to be guided by laws of honour, which that abhors; to imitate characters, which that deteſts; and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and ſuicides with admiration, whoſe conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of theſe oppoſite principles was generated that monſtrous ſyſtem of cruelty and benevolence, of barbariſm and civility, of rapine and juſtice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generoſity, which harraſſed the world for ſeveral centuries with cruſades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and ſingle combats, and even ſtill retains influence enough, under the name of honour, to defeat the moſt beneficent ends of this holy inſtitution. I mean not by this to paſs any cenſure on the principles of valour, patriotiſm, or honour: they

they may be uſeful, and perhaps neceſſary, in the commerce and buſineſs of the preſent turbulent and imperfect ſtate; and thoſe who are actuated by them may be virtuous, honeſt, and even religious men: all that I aſſert is, that they cannot be Chriſtians. A profligate may be a Chriſtian, though a bad one, becauſe he may be overpowered by paſſions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whoſe ruling principle is honour, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a Chriſtian, becauſe he erects a ſtandard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically oppoſite to the whole tenour of that religion.

The contraſt between the Chriſtian, and all other inſtitutions religious or moral, previous to its appearance, is ſufficiently evident, and ſurely the ſuperiority of the former is as little to be diſputed; unleſs any one ſhall undertake to prove, that humility, patience, forgiveneſs, and benevolence are leſs amiable, and leſs beneficial qualities, than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity:

nity: that the contempt of riches is leſs noble, than the acquiſition by fraud and villainy, or the diſtribution of them to the poor, leſs commendable than avarice or profuſion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object leſs exalted, leſs rational, and leſs worthy of purſuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applauſe of men: that worthleſs tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedneſs of the other; a tribute, which a wiſe man ought always to deſpiſe, becauſe a good man can ſcarce ever obtain.

CON-

CONCLUSION.

IF I miſtake not, I have now fully eſtabliſhed the truth of my three propoſitions.

Firſt, That there is now extant a book intitled the New Teſtament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a ſyſtem of religion entirely new; both in its object, and its doctrines, not only ſuperior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewiſe be collected a ſyſtem of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reaſon is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wiſeſt philoſophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on falſe principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly

culiarly correſponding with the new object of this religion.

Every one of theſe propoſitions, I am perſuaded, is incontrovertibly true; and if true, this ſhort, but certain concluſion muſt inevitably follow; That ſuch a ſyſtem of religion and morality could not poſſibly have been the work of any man, or ſet of men, much leſs of thoſe obſcure, ignorant, and illiterate perſons who actually did diſcover, and publiſh it to the world; and that therefore it muſt have been effected by the ſupernatural interpoſition of divine power and wiſdom; that is, that it muſt derive its origin from God.

This argument ſeems to me little ſhort of demonſtration, and is indeed founded on the very ſame reaſoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of his inviſible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein contained; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too ſmall for perception

ception, and the immenſe planetary orbs too vaſt for imagination: We are certain that theſe cannot be the works of man; and therefore we conclude with reaſon, that they muſt be the productions of an omnipotent Creator. In the ſame manner we ſee here a ſcheme of religion and morality unlike and ſuperior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impoſſible to have been diſcovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man; and therefore by the very ſame mode of reaſoning, and with the ſame juſtice, we conclude, that it muſt derive its origin from the ſame omnipotent and omniſcient Being.

Nor was the propagation of this religion leſs extraordinary than the religion itſelf, or leſs above the reach of all human power, than the diſcovery of it was above that of all human underſtanding. It is well known, that in the courſe of a very few years it was ſpread over all the principal parts of Aſia and of Europe, and this by the miniſtry only of an inconſiderable number of the

moſt inconſiderable perſons; that at this time Paganiſm was in the higheſt repute, believed univerſally by the vulgar, and patroniſed by the great; that the wiſeſt men of the wiſeſt nations aſſiſted at its ſacrifices, and conſulted its oracles on the moſt important occaſions: Whether theſe were the tricks of the prieſts or of the devil, is of no conſequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome; the fact is certain, that on the preaching of a few fiſhermen, their altars were deſerted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever we may think of the reſt: and this is ſurely ſufficient to prove the authority of their commiſſion; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could poſſibly be their own.

How much this divine inſtitution has been corrupted, or how ſoon theſe corruptions began, how far it has been diſcoloured by the falſe notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds, or how

how early theſe notions and fictions were introduced, no learning or ſagacity is now able preciſely to aſcertain; but ſurely no man, who ſeriouſly conſiders the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at firſt propagated through the world, the perſons who atchieved that wonderful work, and the originality of thoſe writings in which it is ſtill recorded, can poſſibly believe that it could ever have been the production of impoſture, or chance; or that from an impoſture the moſt wicked and blaſphemous (for if an impoſture, ſuch it is) all the religion and virtue now exiſting on earth can derive their ſource.

But notwithſtanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe, that at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian luſtre, were inſufficient for the taſk, the ſon of a carpenter, together with twelve of the meaneſt and moſt illiterate mechanics, his aſſociates, unaſſiſted by any ſupernatural power, ſhould be able to diſcover or invent a ſyſtem of theology

the moſt ſublime, and of ethics the moſt perfect, which had eſcaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Ariſtotle, and Cicero; and that from this ſyſtem, by their own ſagacity, they had excluded every falſe virtue, though univerſally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though deſpiſed and ridiculed by all the reſt of the world: If any one can believe that theſe men could become impoſtors, for no other purpoſe than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honeſty, and martyrs without the leaſt proſpect of honour or advantage; or that, if all this ſhould have been poſſible, theſe few inconſiderable perſons ſhould have been able, in the courſe of a few years, to have ſpread this their religion over moſt parts of the then known world, in oppoſition to the intereſts, pleaſures, ambition, prejudices, and even reaſon of mankind; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of ſtates, the force of cuſtom, the blindneſs of zeal, the influence of prieſts, the arguments of orators, and the philoſophy of the world, without

without any ſupernatural aſſiſtance; if any one can believe all theſe miraculous events, contradictory to the conſtant experience of the powers and diſpoſitions of human nature, he muſt be poſſeſſed of much more faith than is neceſſary to make him a Chriſtian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

But ſhould theſe credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable; from believing it what harm could enſue? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or ſubjects more ungovernable? the rich more inſolent, or the poor more diſorderly? Would it make worſe parents or children, huſbands or wives, maſters or ſervants, friends or neighbours? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and conſequently more happy in every ſituation? It could not be criminal; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, becauſe it cannot be a crime to aſſent to ſuch evidence, as has been able to convince the beſt and wiſeſt of mankind; by

which, if falſe, Providence muſt have permitted men to deceive each other, for the moſt beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be ſurely more meritorious to believe, from a diſpoſition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with ſcorn from obſtinacy and ſelf-conceit: It cannot be detrimental, becauſe if Chriſtianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a ſteady and uniform courſe of virtue, piety, and devotion, or can ſupport them in the hour of diſtreſs, of ſickneſs, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deiſm on the minds of pagan philoſophers, that can now avail us nothing: for that light which once lightened the Gentiles, is now abſorbed in the brighter illumination of the goſpel; we can now form no rational ſyſtem of deiſm, but what muſt be borrowed from that ſource, and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, muſt be exactly the ſame; and therefore if we will not accept of Chriſtianity, we can have no religion at all. Accordingly

cordingly we ſee, that thoſe who fly from this, ſcarce ever ſtop at deiſm; but haſten on with great alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever.

If I have here demonſtrated the divine origin of the Chriſtian religion by an argument which cannot be confuted; no others, however plauſible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever diſprove it, becauſe if it is once ſhewn to be true, it cannot be falſe. But as many arguments of this kind have bewildered ſome candid and ingenuous minds, I ſhall here beſtow a few lines on thoſe which have the moſt weight, in order to wipe out, or at leaſt to diminiſh their perplexing influence.

But here I muſt previouſly obſerve, that the moſt unſurmountable, as well as the moſt uſual obſtacle to our belief, ariſes from our paſſions, appetites, and intereſts; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the underſtanding, we oftener diſbelieve for want of inclination, than want of evidence. The firſt ſtep towards thinking this revela-

tion true, is our hopes that it is ſo; for whenever we much wiſh any propoſition to be true, we are not far from believing it. It is certainly for the intereſt of all good men, that its authority ſhould be well founded; and ſtill more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better: becauſe it is the only ſyſtem either of reaſon or religion which can give them any aſſurance of pardon. The puniſhment of vice is a debt due to juſtice, which cannot be remitted without compenſation: repentance can be no compenſation; it may change a wicked man's diſpoſitions, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is paſt. If any one by profligacy and extravagance contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiſer, and hinder him from running into further diſtreſſes, but can never pay off his old bonds; for which he muſt be ever accountable, unleſs they are diſcharged by himſelf, or ſome other in his ſtead: this very diſcharge Chriſtianity alone holds forth on our repentance,

pentance, and, if true, will certainly perform: the truth of it therefore muſt ardently be wiſhed for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent or reform. It is well worth every man's while, who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Chriſtianity, if he can; becauſe he will find it the ſureſt preſervative againſt all vicious habits and their attendant evils, the beſt reſource under diſtreſſes and diſappointments, ill health, and ill fortune, and the firmeſt baſis on which contemplation can reſt; and without ſome, the human mind is never perfectly at eaſe. But if any one is attached to a favourite pleaſure, or eagerly engaged in worldly purſuits incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he muſt either relinquiſh thoſe purſuits with uneaſineſs, or perſiſt in them with remorſe and diſſatisfaction, and therefore muſt commence unbeliever in his own defence. With ſuch I ſhall not diſpute, nor pretend to perſuade men by arguments to make themſelves miſerable: but to thoſe, who, not

afraid

afraid that this religion may be true, are really affected by such objections, I will offer the following answers, which, though short, will, I doubt not, be sufficient to shew them their weakness and futility.

In the first place, then, some have been so bold as to strike at the root of all revelation from God, by asserting, that it is incredible, because unnecessary, and unnecessary, because the reason which he has bestowed on mankind is sufficiently able to discover all the religious and moral duties which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her friendly admonitions. Mankind have undoubtedly at various times from the remotest ages received so much knowledge by divine communications, and have ever been so much inclined to impute it all to their own sufficiency, that it is now difficult to determine what human reason unassisted can effect: But to form a true judgment on this subject, let us turn our eyes to those remote regions of the globe, to which this supernatural assistance

ſiſtance has never yet extended, and we ſhall there ſee men endued with ſenſe and reaſon not inferior to our own, ſo far from being capable of forming ſyſtems of religion and morality, that they are at this day totally unable to make a nail or a hatchet: from whence we may ſurely be convinced, that reaſon alone is ſo far from being ſufficient to offer to mankind a perfect religion, that it has never yet been able to lead them to any degree of culture or civilization whatever. Theſe have uniformly flowed from that great fountain of divine communication opened in the eaſt, in the earlieſt ages, and thence been gradually diffuſed in ſalubrious ſtreams, throughout the various regions of the earth. Their riſe and progreſs, by ſurveying the hiſtory of the world, may eaſily be traced backwards to their ſource; and wherever theſe have not as yet been able to penetrate, we there find the human ſpecies not only void of all true religious and moral ſentiments, but not the leaſt emerged from their original ignorance and barbarity;

barbarity; which ſeems a demonſtration, that although human reaſon is capable of progreſſion in ſcience, yet the firſt foundations muſt be laid by ſupernatural inſtructions: for ſurely no other probable cauſe can be aſſigned, why one part of mankind ſhould have made ſuch an amazing progreſs in religious, moral, metaphyſical, and philoſophical enquiries; ſuch wonderful improvements in policy, legiſlation, commerce, and manufactures, while the other part, formed with the ſame natural capacities, and divided only by ſeas and mountains, ſhould remain, during the ſame number of ages, in a ſtate little ſuperior to brutes, without government, without laws or letters, and even without clothes and habitations; murdering each other to ſatiate their revenge, and devouring each other to appeaſe their hunger: I ſay no cauſe can be aſſigned for this amazing difference, except that the firſt have received information from thoſe divine communications recorded in the ſcriptures, and the latter have never yet been favoured with ſuch

aſſiſtance.

aſſiſtance. This remarkable contraſt ſeems an unanſwerable, though perhaps a new proof of the neceſſity of revelation, and a ſolid refutation of all arguments againſt it, drawn from the ſufficiency of human reaſon. And as reaſon in her natural ſtate is thus incapable of making any progreſs in knowledge; ſo when furniſhed with materials by ſupernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, ſhe falls into more numerous and more groſs errors, than her own native ignorance could ever have ſuggeſted. There is then no abſurdity ſo extravagant, which ſhe is not ready to adopt: ſhe has perſuaded ſome, that there is no God; others, that there can be no future ſtate: ſhe has taught ſome, that there is no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat and to relieve his neceſſities are actions equally meritorious: ſhe has convinced many, that they have no free-will, in oppoſition to their own experience; ſome, that there can be no ſuch thing as ſoul, or ſpirit, contrary to their own perceptions;

ceptions; and others, no ſuch thing as matter or body, in contradiction to their ſenſes. By analyſing all things ſhe can ſhew, that there is nothing in any thing; by perpetual ſifting ſhe can reduce all exiſtence to the inviſible duſt of ſcepticiſm; and by recurring to firſt principles, prove to the ſatisfaction of her followers, that there are no principles at all. How far ſuch a guide is to be depended on in the important concerns of religion, and morals, I leave to the judgment of every conſiderate man to determine. This is certain, that human reaſon in its higheſt ſtate of cultivation amongſt the philoſophers of Greece and Rome, was never able to form a religion comparable to Chriſtianity; nor have all thoſe ſources of moral virtue, ſuch as truth, beauty, and the fitneſs of things, which modern philoſophers have endeavoured to ſubſtitute in its ſtead, ever been effectual to produce good men, and have themſelves often been the productions of ſome of the worſt.

Others there are, who allow, that a revela-

tion from God may be both neceſſary, and credible; but alledge, that the ſcriptures, that is the books of the Old and New Teſtament, cannot be that revelation; becauſe in them are to be found errors and inconſiſtencies, fabulous ſtories, falſe facts, and falſe philoſophy; which can never be derived from the fountain of all wiſdom and truth. To this I reply, that I readily acknowledge, that the ſcriptures are not revelations from God, but the hiſtory of them: The revelation itſelf is derived from God; but the hiſtory of it is the production of men, and therefore the truth of it is not in the leaſt affected by their fallibility, but depends on the internal evidence of its own ſupernatural excellence. If in theſe books ſuch a religion, as has been here deſcribed, actually exiſts, no ſeeming, or even real defects to be found in them can diſprove the divine origin of this religion, or invalidate my argument. Let us, for inſtance, grant that the Moſaic hiſtory of the creation was founded on the erroneous but popular principles

ciples of thoſe early ages, who imagined the earth to be a vaſt plain, and the celeſtial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it; will it from thence follow, that Moſes could not be a proper inſtrument in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a divine law, becauſe he was not inſpired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian ſyſtems? or that Chriſt muſt be an impoſtor, becauſe Moſes was not an aſtronomer? Let us alſo ſuppoſe, that the accounts of Chriſt's temptation in the wilderneſs, the devil's taking refuge in the herd of ſwine, with ſeveral other narrations in the New Teſtament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but ſtories accommodated to the ignorance and ſuperſtitions of the times and countries in which they were written, or pious frauds intended to impreſs on vulgar minds a higher reverence of the power and ſanctity of Chriſt; will this in the leaſt impeach the excellence of his religion, or the authority of its founder? or is

Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity anſwerable for all the fables of which it may have been the innocent occaſion? The want of this obvious diſtinction has much injured the Chriſtian cauſe; becauſe on this ground it has ever been moſt ſucceſsfully attacked, and on this ground it is not eaſily to be defended: for if the records of this revelation are ſuppoſed to be the revelation itſelf, the leaſt defect diſcovered in them muſt be fatal to the whole. What has led many to overlook this diſtinction, is that common phraſe, that the ſcriptures are the word of God; and in one ſenſe they certainly are; that is, they are the ſacred repoſitory of all the revelations, diſpenſations, promiſes, and precepts, which God has vouchſafed to communicate to mankind; but by this expreſſion we are not to underſtand, that every part of this voluminous collection of hiſtorical, poetical, prophetical, theological, and moral writings, which we call the Bible, was dictated by the immediate influence of divine inſpiration: the authors of theſe books pretend to no ſuch

infallibility, and if they claim it not for themſelves, who has the authority to claim it for them? Chriſt required no ſuch belief from thoſe who were willing to be his diſciples. He ſays, "He that believeth on "me, hath everlaſting life*;" but where does he ſay, He that believeth not every word contained in the Old Teſtament, which was then extant, or every word in the New Teſtament, which was to be wrote for the inſtruction of future generations, hath not everlaſting life? There are innumerable occurrences related in the ſcriptures, ſome of greater, ſome of leſs, and ſome of no importance at all; the truth of which we can have no reaſon to queſtion, but the belief of them is ſurely not eſſential to the faith of a Chriſtian: I have no doubt but that St. Paul was ſhipwrecked, and that he left his cloak and his parchments at Troas; but the belief of theſe facts makes no part of Chriſtianity, nor is the truth of them any proof of its authority. It proves only that this apoſtle could

* John vi. 47.

not

not in common life be under the perpetual influence of infallible inſpiration; for, had he been ſo, he would not have put to ſea before a ſtorm, nor have forgot his cloak. Theſe writers were undoubtedly directed by ſupernatural influence in all things neceſſary to the great work, which they were appointed to perform: At particular times, and on particular occaſions, they were enabled to utter prophecies, to ſpeak languages, and to work miracles; but in all other circumſtances, they ſeem to have been left to the direction of their own underſtandings, like other men. In the ſciences of hiſtory, geography, aſtronomy, and philoſophy, they appear to have been no better inſtructed than others, and therefore were not leſs liable to be miſled by the errors and prejudices of the times and countries in which they lived. They related facts like honeſt men, to the beſt of their knowledge or information, and they recorded the divine leſſons of their maſter with the utmoſt fidelity; but they pretended to no infallibility, for they ſometimes differed

in their relations, and they ſometimes diſagreed in their ſentiments. All which proves only, that they did not act, or write, in a combination to deceive, but not in the leaſt impeaches the truth of the revelation which they publiſhed; which depends not on any external evidence whatever: for I will venture to affirm, that if any one could prove, what is impoſſible to be proved, becauſe it is not true, that there are errors in geography, chronology, and philoſophy, in every page of the Bible; that the prophecies therein delivered are all but fortunate gueſſes, or artful applications, and the miracles there recorded no better than legendary tales: if any one could ſhew, that theſe books were never written by their pretended authors, but were poſterior impoſitions on illiterate and credulous ages: all theſe wonderful diſcoveries would prove no more than this, tht God, for reaſons to us unknown, had thought proper to permit a revelation by him communicated to mankind, to be mixed with their ignorance, and corrupted by their frauds

frauds from its earlieſt infancy, in the ſame manner in which he has viſibly permitted it to be mixed, and corrupted from that period to the preſent hour. If in theſe books a religion ſuperior to all human imagination actually exiſts, it is of no conſequence to the proof of its divine origin, by what means it was there introduced, or with what human errors and imperfections it is blended. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is ſtill a diamond, nor can the dirt, which ſurrounds it, depreciate its value or deſtroy its luſtre.

To ſome ſpeculative and refined obſervers, it has appeared incredible, that a wiſe and benevolent Creator ſhould have conſtituted a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another; that is, that he ſhould have revealed a religion to mankind, which not only contradicts the principal paſſions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole œconomy of that world which he has created, and in which he has thought proper to

place them. This, ſay they, with regard to the Chriſtian is apparently the caſe: the love of power, riches, honour, and fame, are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this inſtitution are all theſe depreciated and diſcouraged. Government is eſſential to the nature of man, and cannot be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and impoſition; yet are all theſe ſtrictly forbid. Nations cannot ſubſiſt without wars, nor war be carried on without rapine, deſolation, and murder; yet are theſe prohibited under the ſevereſt threats. The non-reſiſtance of evil muſt ſubject individuals to continual oppreſſions, and leave nations a defenceleſs prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under inſults and injuries muſt every day provoke new inſults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, muſt put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and induſtry; yet is this required. In ſhort, were theſe precepts univerſally obeyed, the

diſpoſition

diſpoſition of all human affairs muſt be entirely changed, and the buſineſs of the world, conſtituted as it now is, could not go on. To all this I anſwer, that ſuch indeed is the Chriſtian revelation, though ſome of its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it, and ſuch it is conſtantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by thoſe who publiſhed it under his immediate direction: To theſe he ſays, "If ye were of the world, "the world would love his own; but be- "cauſe ye are not of the world, but I have "choſen you out of the world, therefore the "world hateth you *." To the Jews he declares, "Ye are of this world; I am not "of this world †." St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this "world ‡;" and to the Corinthians, "We "ſpeak not the wiſdom of this world §." St. James ſays, "Know ye not, that the "friendſhip of the world is enmity with "God? whoſoever therefore will be a

* John xv. 19. † John viii. 23.
‡ Rom. xii. 2. § 1 Cor. ii. 6.

" friend of the world is the enemy of " God*." This irreconcileable diſagreement between Chriſtianity and the world is announced in numberleſs other places in the New Teſtament, and indeed by the whole tenour of thoſe writings. Theſe are plain declarations, which, in ſpite of all the evaſions of thoſe good managers, who chooſe to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, ſtand fixed and immoveable againſt all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended neceſſity, and muſt ever forbid any reconciliation between the purſuits of this world and the Chriſtian inſtitution: but they who reject it on this account, enter not into the ſublime ſpirit of this religion, which is not a code of preciſe laws deſigned for the well-ordering ſociety, adapted to the ends of worldly convenience, and amenable to the tribunal of human prudence; but a divine leſſon of purity and perfection, ſo far ſuperior to the low conſiderations of conqueſt, government, and

* Jam. iv. 4.

commerce,

commerce, that it takes no more notice of them, than of the battles of game-cocks, the policy of bees, or the induſtry of ants: they recollect not what is the firſt and principal object of this inſtitution; that this is not, as has been often repeated, to make us happy, or even virtuous in the preſent life, for the ſake of augmenting our happineſs here; but to conduct us through a ſtate of dangers and ſufferings, of ſin and temptation, in ſuch a manner as to qualify us for the enjoyment of happineſs hereafter. All other inſtitutions of religion and morals were made for the world, but the characteriſtic of this is to be againſt it; and therefore the merits of Chriſtian doctrines are not to be weighed in the ſcales of public utility, like thoſe of moral precepts, becauſe worldly utility is not their end. If Chriſt and his apoſtles had pretended, that the religion which they preached would advance the power, wealth, and proſperity of nations, or of men, they would have deſerved but little credit; but they conſtantly profeſs the contrary, and

every where declare, that their religion is adverſe to the world, and all its purſuits. Chriſt ſays, ſpeaking of his diſciples, "They "are not of the world, even as I am not of "the world*." It can therefore be no imputation on this religion, or on any of its precepts, that they tend not to an end which their author profeſſedly diſclaims: nor can it ſurely be deemed a defect, that it is adverſe to the vain purſuits of this world; for ſo are reaſon, wiſdom, and experience; they all teach us the ſame leſſon, they all demonſtrate to us every day, that theſe are begun on falſe hopes, carried on with diſquietude, and end in diſappointment. This profeſſed incompatibility with the little, wretched, and iniquitous buſineſs of the world, is therefore ſo far from being a defect in this religion, that, was there no other proof of its divine origin, this alone, I think, would be abundantly ſufficient. The great plan and benevolent deſign of this diſpenſation is plainly this; to enlighten the minds, purify the reli-

* John xvii. 16.

gion,

gion, and amend the morals of mankind in general, and to ſelect the moſt meritorious of them to be ſucceſſively tranſplanted into the kingdom of heaven: which gracious offer is impartially tendered to all, who by perſeverance in meekneſs, patience, piety, charity, and a detachment from the world, are willing to qualify themſelves for this holy and happy ſociety. Was this univerſally accepted, and did every man obſerve ſtrictly every precept of the goſpel, the face of human affairs and the œconomy of the world would indeed be greatly changed; but ſurely they would be changed for the better; and we ſhould enjoy much more happineſs, even here, than at preſent: for we muſt not forget, that evils are by it forbid as well as reſiſtance; injuries, as well as revenge; all unwillingneſs to diffuſe the enjoyments of life, as well as ſolicitude to acquire them; all obſtacles to ambition, as well as ambition itſelf; and therefore all contentions for power and intereſt would be at an end; and the world would go on much more happily than

than it now does. But this univerſal acceptance of ſuch an offer was never expected from ſo depraved and imperfect a creature as man, and therefore could never have been any part of the deſign: for it was foreknown and foretold by him who made it, that few, very few would accept it on theſe terms. He ſays, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is "the way which leadeth into life, and few "there be that find it*." Accordingly we ſee, that very few are prevailed on, by the hopes of future happineſs, to relinquiſh the purſuits of preſent pleaſures or intereſts, and therefore theſe purſuits are little interrupted by the receſſion of ſo inconſiderable a number. As the natural world ſubſiſts by the ſtruggles of the ſame elements, ſo does the moral by the contentions of the ſame paſſions, as from the beginning: the generality of mankind are actuated by the ſame motives, fight, ſcuffle, and ſcramble for power, riches, and pleaſures with the ſame eagerneſs: all occupations and profeſſions

* Matt. vii. 4.

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are exercised with the same alacrity, and there are soldiers, lawyers, statesmen, patriots, and politicians, just as if Christianity had never existed. Thus we see this wonderful dispensation has answered all the purposes for which it was intended: it has enlightened the minds, purified the religion, and amended the morals of mankind; and, without subverting the constitution, policy, or business of the world, opened a gate, though a strait one, through which all, who are wise enough to choose it, and good enough to be fit for it, may find an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Others have said, that if this revelation had really been from God, his infinite power and goodness could never have suffered it to have been so soon perverted from its original purity, to have continued in a state of corruption through the course of so many ages, and at last to have proved so ineffectual to the reformation of mankind. To these I answer, that all this, on examination, will be found inevitable, from the nature of

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all revelations communicated to ſo imperfect a creature as man, and from circumſtances peculiar to the riſe and progreſs of the Chriſtian in particular: for when this was firſt preached to the gentile nations, though they were not able to withſtand the force of its evidence, and therefore received it; yet they could not be prevailed on to relinquiſh their old ſuperſtitions, and former opinions, but choſe rather to incorporate them with it: by which means it was neceſſarily mixed with their ignorance, and their learning; by both which it was equally injured. The people defaced its worſhip by blending it with their idolatrous ceremonies, and the philoſophers corrupted its doctrines by weaving them up with the notions of the Gnoſtics, Myſtics, and Manichæans, the prevailing ſyſtems of thoſe times. By degrees its irreſiſtible excellence gained over princes, potentates, and conquerors to its intereſts, and it was ſupported by their patronage: but that patronage ſoon engaged it in their policies and conteſts, and deſtroyed that excellence by which

which it had been acquired. At length the meek and humble profeſſors of the goſpel enſlaved theſe princes, and conquered theſe conquerors their patrons, and erected for themſelves ſuch a ſtupendous fabric of wealth and power, as the world had never ſeen: they then propagated their religion by the ſame methods, by which it had been perſecuted; nations were converted by fire and ſword, and the vanquiſhed were baptized with daggers at their throats. All theſe events we ſee proceed from a chain of cauſes and conſequences, which could not have been broken without changing the eſtabliſhed courſe of things by a conſtant ſeries of miracles, or a total alteration of human nature: whilſt that continues as it is, the pureſt religion muſt be corrupted by a conjunction with power and riches, and it will alſo then appear to be much more corrupted than it really is; becauſe many are inclined to think, that every deviation from its primitive ſtate is a corruption. Chriſtianity was at firſt preached by the poor and mean, in holes

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and caverns, under the iron rod of perſecution, and therefore many abſurdly conclude, that any degree of wealth or power in its miniſters, or of magnificence in its worſhip, are corruptions inconſiſtent with the genuine ſimplicity of its original ſtate: they are offended, that modern biſhops ſhould poſſeſs titles, palaces, revenues, and coaches, when it is notorious, that their predeceſſors the apoſtles were deſpicable wanderers, without houſes or money, and walked on foot. The apoſtles indeed lived in a ſtate of poverty and perſecution attendant on their particular ſituation, and the work which they had undertaken; this was their misfortune, but no part of their religion, and therefore it can be no more incumbent on their ſucceſſors to imitate their poverty and meanneſs, than to be whipped, impriſoned, and put to death, in compliance with their example. Theſe are all but the ſuggeſtions of envy and malevolence, but no objections to theſe fortunate alterations in Chriſtianity and its profeſſors; which,

which, if not abuſed to the purpoſes of tyranny and ſuperſtition, are in fact no more than the neceſſary and proper effects of its more proſperous ſituation. When a poor man grows rich, or a ſervant becomes a maſter, they ſhould take care that their exaltation prompts them not to be unjuſt or inſolent; but ſurely it is not requiſite or right, that their behaviour and mode of living ſhould be exactly the ſame, when their ſituation is altered. How far this inſtitution has been effectual to the reformation of mankind, it is not eaſy now to aſcertain, becauſe the enormities which prevailed before the appearance of it are by time ſo far removed from our ſight, that they are ſcarcely viſible; but thoſe of the moſt gigantic ſize ſtill remain in the records of hiſtory, as monuments of the reſt: Wars in thoſe ages were carried on with a ferocity and cruelty unknown to the preſent: whole cities and nations were extirpated by fire and ſword; and thouſands of the vanquiſhed were crucified and impaled for having endeavoured only

to defend themſelves and their country. The lives of new-born infants were then intirely at the diſpoſal of their parents, who were at liberty to bring them up, or to expoſe them to periſh by cold and hunger, or to be devoured by birds and beaſts; and this was frequently practiſed without puniſhment, and even without cenſure. Gladiators were employed by hundreds to cut one another to pieces in public theatres for the diverſion of the moſt polite aſſemblies; and though theſe combatants at firſt conſiſted of criminals only, by degrees men of the higheſt rank, and even ladies of the moſt illuſtrious families, enrolled themſelves in this honourable liſt. On many occaſions human ſacrifices were ordained; and at the funerals of rich and eminent perſons, great numbers of their ſlaves were murdered as victims pleaſing to their departed ſpirits. The moſt infamous obſcenities were made part of their religious worſhip, and the moſt unnatural luſts publickly avowed, and celebrated by their moſt admired poets. At the approach of Chriſtianity

tianity all these horrid abominations vanish-ed; and amongst those who first embraced it, scarce a single vice was to be found: to such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation were the primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature; and to have pursued such a constant and uniform course of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as, in the present times, it is almost as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate. If it is asked, why should not the belief of the same religion now produce the same effects? the answer is short, because it is not believed: The most sovereign medicine can perform no cure, if the patient will not be persuaded to take it. Yet notwithstanding all impediments, it has certainly done a great deal towards diminishing the vices and correcting the dispositions of mankind; and was it universally adopted in belief and practice, would totally eradicate both sin and punishment. But this was ne-

ver expected, or designed, or possible, because, if their existence did not arise from some necessity to us unknown, they never would have been permitted to exist at all; and therefore they can no more be extirpated, than they could have been prevented: for this would certainly be incompatible with the frame and constitution of this world, and in all probability with that of another. And this, I think, well accounts for that reserve and obscurity with which this religion was at first promulgated, and that want of irresistible evidence of its truth, by which it might possibly have been enforced. Christ says to his disciples, "To you it is given to "know the mystery of the kingdom of God; "but unto them that are without, all these "things are done in parables; that seeing "they may see, and not perceive, and hear-"ing they may hear, and not understand; "lest at any time they should be converted, "and their sins should be forgiven them *." That is, to you by peculiar favour it is given

* Mark iv. 11, 12.

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to know and underſtand the doctrines of my religion, and by that means to qualify yourſelves for the kingdom of heaven; but to the multitude without, that is to all mankind in general, this indulgence cannot be extended; becauſe that all men ſhould be exempted from ſin and puniſhment is utterly repugnant to the univerſal ſyſtem, and that conſtitution of things, which infinite wiſdom has thought proper to adopt.

Objections have likewiſe been raiſed to the divine authority of this religion from the incredibility of ſome of its doctrines, particularly of thoſe concerning the Trinity, and atonement for ſin by the ſufferings and death of Chriſt; the one contradicting all the principles of human reaſon, and the other all our ideas of divine juſtice. To theſe objections I ſhall only ſay, that no arguments founded on principles, which we cannot comprehend, can poſſibly diſprove a propoſition already proved on principles which we do underſtand; and therefore that on this ſubject they ought not to be attended to:

That three Beings ſhould be one Being, is a propoſition which certainly contradicts reaſon, that is, *our* reaſon; but it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true; for there are many propoſitions which contradict our reaſon, and yet are demonſtrably true: one is the very firſt principle of all religion, the being of a God; for that any thing ſhould exiſt without a cauſe, or that any thing ſhould be the cauſe of its own exiſtence, are propoſitions equally contradictory to our reaſon; yet one of them muſt be true, or nothing could ever have exiſted: in like manner the over-ruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures, his certain fore-knowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of thoſe events, are to our apprehenſions abſolute contradictions to each other; and yet the truth of every one of theſe is demonſtrable from Scripture, reaſon, and experience. All theſe difficulties ariſe from our imagining, that the mode of exiſtence of all Beings muſt be ſimilar to our own; that is, that they muſt

muſt all exiſt in time, and ſpace; and hence proceeds our embarraſſment on this ſubject. We know, that no two Beings, with whoſe mode of exiſtence we are acquainted, can exiſt in the ſame point of time, in the ſame point of ſpace, and that therefore they cannot be one: but how far Beings, whoſe mode of exiſtence bears no relation to time or ſpace, may be united, we cannot comprehend: and therefore the poſſibility of ſuch an union we cannot poſitively deny. In like manner our reaſon informs us, that the puniſhment of the innocent, inſtead of the guilty, is diametrically oppoſite to juſtice, rectitude, and all pretenſions to utility; but we ſhould alſo remember, that the ſhort line of our reaſon cannot reach to the bottom of this queſtion: it cannot inform us, by what means either guilt or puniſhment ever gained a place in the works of a Creator infinitely good and powerful, whoſe goodneſs muſt have induced him, and whoſe power muſt have enabled him, to exclude them: It cannot aſſure us, that ſome ſufferings of individuals are not neceſſary to

the happineſs and well-being of the whole? It cannot convince us, that they do not actually ariſe from this neceſſity, or that, for this cauſe, they may not be required of us, and levied like a tax for the public benefit; or that this tax may not be paid by one Being, as well as another; and therefore, if voluntarily offered, be juſtly accepted from the innocent inſtead of the guilty. Of all theſe circumſtances we are totally ignorant; nor can our reaſon afford us any information, and therefore we are not able to aſſert, that this meaſure is contrary to juſtice, or void of utility: for, unleſs we could firſt reſolve that great queſtion, Whence came evil? we can decide nothing on the diſpenſations of Providence; becauſe they muſt neceſſarily be connected with that undiſcoverable principle; and, as we know not the root of the diſeaſe, we cannot judge of what is, or is not, a proper and effectual remedy. It is remarkable, that, notwithſtanding all the ſeeming abſurdities of this doctrine, there is one circumſtance much in its favour; which

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is, that it has been univerſally adopted in all ages, as far as hiſtory can carry us back in our inquiries to the earlieſt times; in which we find all nations, civilized and barbarous, however differing in all other religious opinions, agreeing alone in the expediency of appeaſing their offended Deities by ſacrifices, that is, by the vicarious ſufferings of men or other animals. This notion could never have been derived from reaſon, becauſe it directly contradicts it; nor from ignorance, becauſe ignorance could never have contrived ſo unaccountable an expedient, nor have been uniform in all ages and countries in any opinion whatſoever; nor from the artifice of kings or prieſts, in order to acquire dominion over the people, becauſe it ſeems not adapted to this end; and we find it implanted in the minds of the moſt remote ſavages at this day diſcovered, who have neither kings or prieſts, artifice or dominion, amongſt them. It muſt therefore be derived from natural inſtinct or ſupernatural revelation, both which are equally the ope-

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rations of divine power. If it is further urged, that however true these doctrines may be, yet it must be inconsistent with the justice and goodness of the Creator, to require from his creatures the belief of propositions which contradict, or are above the reach of that reason, which he has thought proper to bestow upon them. To this I answer, that genuine Christianity requires no such belief: It has discovered to us many important truths, with which we were before intirely unacquainted; and amongst them are these: that three Beings are some way united in the divine essence; and that God will accept of the sufferings of Christ as an atonement for the sins of mankind. These, considered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, or are above the reach of human reason: The first is a proposition as plain, as that three equilateral lines compose one triangle; the other is as intelligible, as that one man should discharge the debts of another. In what manner this union is formed, or why God accepts these vicarious punishments,

niſhments, or to what purpoſes they may be ſubſervient, it informs us not, becauſe no information could enable us to comprehend theſe myſteries; and therefore it does not require that we ſhould know or believe any thing about them. The truth of theſe doctrines muſt reſt intirely on the authority of thoſe who taught them; but then we ſhould reflect that thoſe were the ſame perſons who taught us a ſyſtem of religion more ſublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to diſcover, but which when diſcovered are exactly conſonant to our reaſon; and that therefore we ſhould not haſtily reject thoſe informations which they have vouchſafed to give us, of which our reaſon is not a competent judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of ſeveral propoſitions by demonſtrations which we underſtand, we heſitate not on his authority to aſſent to others, the proceſs of whoſe proofs we are not able to follow: why therefore ſhould we refuſe that credit to Chriſt and

and his Apoſtles, which we think reaſonable to give to one another?

Many have objected to the whole ſcheme of this revelation, as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjuſt, and unworthy of an omniſcient and omnipotent author, who cannot be ſuppoſed to have favoured particular perſons, countries, and times, with this divine communication, while others no leſs meritorious have been altogether excluded from its benefits; nor to have changed and counteracted his own deſigns; that is, to have formed mankind able and diſpoſed to render themſelves miſerable by their own wickedneſs, and then to have contrived ſo ſtrange an expedient to reſtore them to that happineſs which they need never have been permitted to forfeit; and this to be brought about by the unneceſſary interpoſition of a mediator. To all this I ſhall only ſay, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who ſee but as ſmall a part of the Chriſtian, as of the univerſal plan of creation, they are both in regard to all theſe circumſtances exactly ana-

logous to each other. In all the diſpenſations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are diſtributed in a ſimilar manner; health and ſtrength, ſenſe and ſcience, wealth and power, are all beſtowed on individuals and communities in different degrees and at different times. The whole œconomy of this world conſiſts of evils and remedies; and theſe for the moſt part adminiſtered by the inſtrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourſelves into poverty, diſtreſs, and miſery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, inſtructions, and examples of others, to deter or extricate us from theſe calamities. He has formed us ſubject to innumerable diſeaſes, and he has beſtowed on us a variety of remedies. He has made us liable to hunger, thirſt, and nakedneſs, and he ſupplies us with food, drink, and clothing, uſually by the adminiſtration of others. He has created poiſons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the peſtilential heats of the ſummer, and the ſummer's ſunſhine to dry up the inundations of the winter.

winter. Why the conſtitution of nature is ſo formed, why all the viſible diſpenſations of Providence are ſuch, and why ſuch is the Chriſtian diſpenſation alſo, we know not, nor have faculties to comprehend. God might certainly have made the material world a ſyſtem of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies; and the Chriſtian diſpenſation a ſcheme only of moral virtue, productive of happineſs, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diſeaſes, and our minds from all depravity, and we ſhould then have ſtood in no need of medicines to reſtore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favour. It ſeems indeed to our ignorance, that this would have been more conſiſtent with juſtice and reaſon; but his infinite wiſdom has decided in another manner, and formed the ſyſtems both of Nature and Chriſtianity on other principles; and theſe ſo exactly ſimilar, that we have cauſe to conclude that they both muſt proceed

ceed from the ſame ſource of divine power and wiſdom, however inconſiſtent with our reaſon they may appear. Reaſon is undoubtedly our ſureſt guide in all matters, which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence: On the ſubject of revelation her province is only to examine into its authority; and when that is once proved, ſhe has no more to do, but to acquieſce in its doctrines; and therefore is never ſo ill employed, as when ſhe pretends to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. God, ſays this ſelf-ſufficient teacher, is perfectly wiſe, juſt, and good; and what is the inference? That all his diſpenſations muſt be conformable to our notions of perfect wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs: but it ſhould firſt be proved, that man is as perfect, and as wiſe as his Creator, or this conſequence will by no means follow; but rather the reverſe, that is, that the diſpenſations of a perfect and all-wiſe Being muſt probably appear unreaſonable, and perhaps unjuſt, to a Being imperfect and ignorant; and therefore their

ſeeming

ſeeming impoſſibility may be a mark of their truth, and in ſome meaſure juſtify that pious rant of a mad enthuſiaſt, "Credo, quia impoſſibile." Nor is it the leaſt ſurpriſing, that we are not able to underſtand the ſpiritual diſpenſations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no leſs incomprehenſible; our reaſon can afford us no inſight into thoſe great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elaſticity, and electricity, nor even into the eſſence of matter itſelf: Can reaſon teach us how the ſun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whoſe diameter contains many millions of miles, with a conſtant inundation of ſucceſſive rays, during thouſands of years, without any perceivable diminution of that body, from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of thoſe bodies on which they fall, and by which they are conſtantly abſorbed? Can reaſon tell us how thoſe rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon-ball, can ſtrike the tendereſt organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain,

or

or by what means this percuſſion only can convey the forms of diſtant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed between material and immaterial eſſences, or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the ſoul, or the anxiety of the ſoul can emaciate and deſtroy the body? That all theſe things are ſo, we have viſible and indiſputable demonſtration; but how they can be ſo, is to us as incomprehenſible, as the moſt abſtruſe myſteries of revelation can poſſibly be. In ſhort, we ſee ſo ſmall a part of the great whole; we know ſo little of the relation, which the preſent life bears to pre-exiſtent and future ſtates; we can conceive ſo little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of exiſtence; we can comprehend ſo little of the material, and ſo much leſs of the moral plan on which the univerſe is conſtituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from ſuch a being, on ſuch ſubjects, was in every part familiar to our underſtandings, and conſonant to our reaſon, we ſhould have great

cauſe to ſuſpect its divine authority; and therefore, had this revelation been leſs incomprehenſible, it would certainly have been more incredible.

But I ſhall not enter further into the conſideration of theſe abſtruſe and difficult ſpeculations, becauſe the diſcuſſion of them would render this ſhort eſſay too tedious and laborious a taſk for the peruſal of them, for whom it was principally intended; which are all thoſe buſy or idle perſons, whoſe time and thoughts are wholly engroſſed by the purſuits of buſineſs or pleaſure, ambition or luxury, who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by deſultory converſation or ſuperficial reading, and have thence determined with themſelves, that a pretended revelation, founded on ſo ſtrange and improbable a ſtory, ſo contradictory to reaſon, ſo adverſe to the world and all its occupations, ſo incredible in its doctrines, and in its precepts ſo impracticable, can be nothing more than the impoſition of prieſtcraft upon ignorant

and illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the ſuperſtitious vulgar. To talk to ſuch about the Chriſtian religion, is to converſe with the deaf concerning muſic, or with the blind on the beauties of painting: they want all ideas relative to the ſubject, and therefore can never be made to comprehend it: to enable them to do this, their minds muſt be formed for theſe conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abſtraction from buſineſs and diſſipation; by ill-health, diſappointments, and diſtreſſes; and poſſibly by divine interpoſition, or by enthuſiaſm, which is uſually miſtaken for it. Without ſome of theſe preparatory aids, together with a competent degree of learning and application, it is impoſſible that they can think or know, underſtand or believe, any thing about it. If they profeſs to believe, they deceive others; if they fancy that they believe, they deceive themſelves. I am ready to acknowledge, that theſe gentlemen, as far as their information reaches, are perfectly in

the right; and if they are endued with good underſtandings, which have been intirely devoted to the buſineſs or amuſements of the world, they can paſs no other judgment, and muſt revolt from the hiſtory and doctrines of this religion. "The preaching Chriſt "crucified was to the Jews a ſtumbling-"block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*;" and ſo it muſt appear to all, who, like them, judge from eſtabliſhed prejudices, falſe learning, and ſuperficial knowledge; for thoſe who are quite unable to follow the chain of its prophecy, to ſee the beauty and juſtneſs of its moral precepts, and to enter into the wonders of its diſpenſations, can form no other idea of this revelation, but that of a confuſed rhapſody of fictions and abſurdities.

If it is aſked, Was Chriſtianity then intended only for learned divines and profound philoſophers? I anſwer, No: it was at firſt preached by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant; and to ſuch are the

* 1 Cor. i. 26.

practical,

practical, which are the moſt neceſſary parts of it ſufficiently intelligible: but the proofs of its authority undoubtedly are not, becauſe theſe muſt be chiefly drawn from other parts, of a ſpeculative nature, opening to our inquiries inexhauſtible diſcoveries concerning the nature, attributes, and diſpenſations of God, which cannot be underſtood without ſome learning and much attention. From theſe the generality of mankind muſt neceſſarily be excluded, and muſt therefore truſt to others for the grounds of their belief, if they believe at all. And hence perhaps it is, that faith, or eaſineſs of belief, is ſo frequently and ſo ſtrongly recommended in the goſpel; becauſe if men require proofs, of which they themſelves are incapable, and thoſe who have no knowledge on this important ſubject will not place ſome confidence in thoſe who have; the illiterate and unattentive muſt ever continue in a ſtate of unbelief: but then all ſuch ſhould remember, that in all ſciences, even in mathematics themſelves, there are many propoſitions, which on a

curſory view appear to the moſt acute underſtandings, uninſtructed in that ſcience, to be impoſſible to be true, which yet on a cloſer examination are found to be truths capable of the ſtricteſt demonſtration; and that therefore, in diſquiſitions on which we cannot determine without much learned inveſtigation, reaſon uninformed is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought ſurely to conclude, that it may be at leaſt as poſſible for them to be miſtaken in diſbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for thoſe great maſters of reaſon and erudition, Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Addiſon, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief: a belief, to which they firmly adhered after the moſt diligent and learned reſearches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the ſublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adverſaries; a belief, which they have teſtified to the world by their writings, without any other motive,

than

than their regard for truth and the benefit of mankind. Should the few foregoing pages add but one mite to the treaſures with which theſe learned writers have enriched the world; if they ſhould be ſo fortunate as to perſuade any of theſe minute philoſophers to place ſome confidence in theſe great opinions, and to diſtruſt their own; if they ſhould be able to convince them, that notwithſtanding all unfavourable appearances, Chriſtianity may not be altogether artifice and error; if they ſhould prevail on them to examine it with ſome attention, or, if that is too much trouble, not to reject it without any examination at all; the purpoſe of this little work will be ſufficiently anſwered. Had the arguments herein uſed, and the new hints here flung out, been more largely diſcuſſed, it might eaſily have been extended to a more conſiderable bulk; but then the buſy would not have had leiſure, nor the idle inclination to have read it. Should it ever have the honour to be admitted into ſuch good

company, they will immediately, I know, determine, that it muſt be the work of ſome enthuſiaſt or methodiſt, ſome beggar, or ſome madman. I ſhall therefore beg leave to aſſure them, that the author is very far removed from all theſe characters: that he once perhaps believed as little as themſelves; but having ſome leiſure and more curioſity, he employed them both in reſolving a queſtion which ſeemed to him of ſome importance—Whether Chriſtianity was really an impoſture founded on an abſurd, incredible, and obſolete fable, as many ſuppoſe it? Or whether it is, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interpoſition of ſupernatural power? On a candid enquiry, he ſoon found, that the firſt was an abſolute impoſſibility, and that its pretenſions to the latter were founded on the moſt ſolid grounds: in the further purſuit of his examination, he perceived, at every ſtep, new lights ariſing, and ſome of the brighteſt from parts of it the moſt obſcure, but productive of the cleareſt proofs, becauſe equally

equally beyond the power of human artifice to invent, and human reaſon to diſcover. Theſe arguments, which have convinced him of the divine origin of this religion, he has here put together in as clear and conciſe a manner as he was able, thinking they might have the ſame effect upon others, and being of opinion, that if there were a few more true Chriſtians in the world, it would be beneficial to themſelves, and by no means detrimental to the public.

SHORT AND CURSORY

OBSERVATIONS

ON

SEVERAL PASSAGES

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

MATT. V. 3.

Μακαριοι οἱ πτωχοι τῳ πνευματι, ὁτι αὐτων ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεια των ὐρανων.

Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

IN this declaration of Chriſt, two queſtions offer themſelves to our conſideration: 1ſt, Who are the poor in ſpirit?—And 2d, What is the kingdom of heaven?

By the poor in ſpirit are here meant, thoſe who, by their natural diſpoſitions, are meek, quiet, teachable, and ſubmiſſive; or thoſe who, by reflection and cultivation, have rendered their diſpoſitions ſuch, and have eradicated from their hearts pride, envy, and ambition, thoſe high-ſpirited paſſions, ſo deſtructive of the happineſs of ſociety, as well as of their own. What portion of mankind comes

comes under this deſcription is known only to the ſearcher of all hearts; but we may reaſonably conclude, that neither heroes, conquerors, or any of thoſe whom the world dignifies with the titles of great men, can be of the number.

By the kingdom of heaven is here to be underſtood, that celeſtial community of the ſpirits* of juſt men made perfect, over which God more immediately preſides, and which is therefore ſometimes called the kingdom of God; in which there are no wars, factions, ſtruggles, or contentions, but all is benevolence, peace, concord, and ſubordination: a kingdom frequently hung out to our view in the New Teſtament, of which we are promiſed to be made ſubjects in a future life, provided we ſhall be properly qualified for it by our behaviour in the preſent.

To ſelect the moſt excellent of mankind, and to qualify them for admiſſion into this holy and happy ſociety, ſeems to be the chief object of the Chriſtian diſpenſation.

* Heb. xii. 23.

What

What that qualification muſt be, we are ſufficiently informed by the author of it—Calling to him little children, he ſays, " Of " ſuch is the kingdom of God;" and again, " Verily I ſay unto you, Whoſoever ſhall not " receive the kingdom of God as a little child, " he ſhall not enter therein *." It is alſo evident from the nature of this community, that none but the poor in ſpirit can be admitted; becauſe, were the proud, factious, turbulent, and ambitious to find entrance, they would immediately deſtroy that tranquillity and happineſs with which it is bleſſed; and this kingdom, though not of this world, would ſoon become exactly ſimilar to thoſe which are.

It is ſaid, " Many are called, but few are " choſen;" but we are not therefore to conclude, that all who are not choſen are to be conſigned to a ſtate of miſery; many who are deficient in this neceſſary qualification, and therefore inadmiſſible into this ſtate of purity and perfection, may deſerve no greater puniſh-

* Mark x. 14, 15.

ment

ment than the loſs of ſo ineſtimable an acquiſition; and ſome perhaps may have virtues which may entitle them to rewards of an inferior kind. Mankind are by no means diviſible into two claſſes only—the righteous and the wicked. We find them indeed ſo divided in many paſſages of the New Teſtament, all which muſt be underſtood but as general declarations, that the righteous ſhall be rewarded, and the wicked puniſhed, in a future life; but cannot be applied to individuals, becauſe in fact no ſuch line of diſtinction can be drawn between them. The generality of mankind are compleatly neither the one or the other: none are ſo good as to be guilty of no crimes, and few ſo bad as to be poſſeſſed of no virtues; and in moſt men they are intermixed, though in very different proportions. The juſtice of Providence muſt have prepared many intermediate ſtates of happineſs and miſery, in which every individual will receive reward or puniſhment in exact proportion to his merits. Aſtronomy has opened to our view innumerable

innumerable worlds, ſome of which are probably happier, and ſome more miſerable than this which we at preſent inhabit; in them there is ample room for the diſplay of the divine juſtice and benevolence, as in ſome of them ſuch a ſituation may be allotted to every one as his conduct has deſerved.

MATT. V. 5.

Μακαριοι οἱ πραεις, ὁτι αὐτοι κληρονομησουσι την γην.

Bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.

IT appears by no means eaſy to reconcile the promiſe with facts and experience; for earthly proſperity, wealth, power, and pre-eminence, are ſo far from being the inheritance of the meek, that they ſeem to be entirely monopolized by the bold, turbulent, and ambitious; and we may ſay with Cato, This world was made for Cæſar.

To extricate themſelves from this difficulty, ſome commentators have been induced to look out for another earth, which they at laſt fortunately found in the words of St. Peter; who ſays, "Nevertheleſs we, according to promiſe, look for new heavens "and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs *." To this new earth, they would

* 2 Pet. iii. 13.

perſuade

perſuade us, this promiſe may with propriety be applied, and that therein it will certainly be fulfilled.

But in explaining this paſſage, there is no occaſion to have recourſe to ſo far-fetched and fanciful an interpretation, nor to call in the aſſiſtance of a new world. By the meek inheriting the earth, nothing more is meant, than that perſons of meek, quiet, and peaceable diſpoſitions, enjoy more happineſs on earth, and ſuffer leſs diſquietude in the preſent life, than thoſe of oppoſite characters: and this is verified by the experience of every day; they acquire more friends, and fewer enemies, they meet with fewer injuries and diſappointments, and bear thoſe which they cannot avoid with leſs uneaſineſs, and paſs thro' the world as they do through a crowd, leſs obſtructed, leſs bruiſed and joſtled, than thoſe who force their way by violence and impetuoſity. To which we may add, that a meek and quiet temper is the moſt efficacious preſervative of health, the firſt of all earthly bleſſings, and without which we are incapa-

ble of enjoying any other. Wealth, power, and grandeur, are by no means eſſential to earthly happineſs; but ſhould we admit that they are, and are included in this promiſe, we ſhould not find it altogether unfulfilled; for, though the turbulent and overbearing may ſometimes ſeize on them by violence, they much oftener fail in their attempts, and ſink by their own inſolence into ruin and contempt; whilſt thoſe of eaſy and conciliating manners, ſilently climb above them, leſs envied, and leſs oppoſed, becauſe leſs noticed and leſs offending.

It is univerſally allowed, that nothing ſo much advances our worldly intereſts, and ſo much aſſiſts us in our purſuits of wealth and honours, as good-breeding; and what is good-breeding, but an affectation of meekneſs, humility, and complacency? if, therefore, the pretence to theſe amiable qualities can do ſo much, ſurely the poſſeſſion of them will do a great deal more. In fact it does, and ſeldom fails to gain us favour, increaſe our friends, and advance our intereſts.—Thus

we

we ſee this promiſe is generally accompliſhed; the meek do inherit the earth, that is, have the beſt chance of acquiring and enjoying the bleſſings of this life, as well as the happineſs of another.

MATT. V. 7.

Μακαριοι οἱ ἐλεημονες, ὁτι αὐτοι ἐλεηθησονται.

Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy.

CRUELTY is the moſt unpardonable of all crimes, becauſe it is without temptation, and therefore without excuſe. Mercy is the moſt amiable attribute of God; and a virtue moſt becoming the ſituation of man, becauſe the ſins which he perpetually commits, and the dangers with which he is conſtantly ſurrounded, oblige him to ſtand in need of it every hour: it is peculiarly congenial to the benevolent ſpirit of the Chriſtian religion, and as ſuch is here enforced by the Author of it, in this ſhort but emphatical declaration; in which it is remarkable, that we find nothing which limits our exerciſe of this amiable virtue within any bounds, or confines it to any deſcription;

tion; not to our relations, our friends, our neighbours, our countrymen, nor even to mankind: from whence we may reaſonably conclude, that he requires us to extend it to every thing that has life and ſenſibility. The words ſeem to regard more the diſpoſition of the actor than the object on which it is exerted: "Bleſſed are the merciful," that is, thoſe who are of a tender and compaſſionate temper, who feel for the miſeries of every thing that has life, and endeavour all in their power to relieve them. Whoever, therefore, can wantonly inflict pain on the meaneſt animal, or receive a diabolical pleaſure from its ſufferings, can have no claim to this bleſſing, nor to obtain that mercy to which he is a ſtranger.

MATT. VI. 16.

Ὅταν δὲ νηστεύητε, μὴ γίνεσθε ὡσπερ οἱ ὑποκριταί.

Moreover, when ye faſt, be not as the hypocrites.

JESUS Chriſt having been born and educated under the Jewiſh inſtitution, complied with all the ceremonies and cuſtoms of that law, and required none of his diſciples to relinquiſh them, in order to receive the religion which he came to teach. Among theſe, faſting at particular ſeaſons was one, which was commanded by their law, obſerved by all, and particularly by the Phariſees, with ſuperſtitious rigour and hypocritical oſtentation; which he here with ſome aſperity reprehends. He reproves them, not for faſting, the uſe of which, as well as that of all the reſt of their religious rites, he approved and encouraged; but it is obſervable, that in theſe words there is nothing

nothing which requires it; taking it for granted, that they would faſt in obedience to their law, he only ſays, "When ye faſt, be "not as the hypocrites;" and then proceeds to inſtruct them how to perform this duty in a proper manner: but does not command them to perform it at all.

This ſilence of their maſter, on a ſubject which they thought ſo important, induced many of the Jews, who had become his diſciples, to excuſe themſelves from complying with this unpleaſant ceremony; as is evident from the queſtion put to him by the diſciples of John the Baptiſt, who ſaid, "Why do we "and the Phariſees faſt often *, but thy diſ-"ciples faſt not?" From hence it appears plainly, that though Chriſt obſerved this, as well as all the ceremonies of the Moſaic law, it was no part of his inſtitution, nor was enjoined by him as a Chriſtian, or a moral duty. This indeed, and every other mode of ſelf-puniſhment, are ſo oppoſite to the benevolent ſpirit of the religion which he

* Matt. ix. 14.

taught,

taught, that it is impoſſible they can make a part of it. Chriſtianity requires us to make every one as happy as we are able, to relieve the poor, viſit the ſick, and comfort the diſtreſſed; but if every man was obliged to inflict ſufferings upon himſelf, inſtead of excluding miſery at every avenue, as we are benevolently commanded, we ſhould introduce as much as if every man was permitted to injure and torment his neighbour. There are many precepts in the New Teſtament, which require us to ſuffer with fortitude and reſignation, for righteouſneſs ſake, for truth, for our religion, or the benefit of mankind; but we find none which enjoin ſufferings for their own ſake, or repreſent them as meritorious in themſelves. St. Peter exhorts his diſciples to ſuffer patiently for theſe great ends, "becauſe "Chriſt alſo ſuffered for them, leaving us an "example that we ſhould follow his ſteps *;" but he does not adviſe us to ſuffer for no end at all.

* 1 Pet. ii. 21.

Faſting,

Faſting, with all the reſt of their religious rites, are continued to the Jews after their converſion to Chriſtianity, but were never impoſed on the proſelytes of any other nation; from whence it is evident, that Chriſt never intended by the goſpel to aboliſh the Moſaic law, with regard to the Jews, nor to extend it to any other people. Hence ariſes that remarkable difference, which cannot eſcape our notice, between the religion of Chriſt and that of his Apoſtles, and particularly of St. Paul; a difference ſo great, that, if we attend not to the cauſe of it, we muſt conſider them as two religious inſtitutions contradictory to each other. Chriſt commands his diſciples to perform the moſt minute ceremonies of the Jewiſh law, to pay tithes even of mint, anniſeed, and cummin *; St. Paul repreſents the moſt important, as uſeleſs and inſignificant, and ſays, "Circumciſion "is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing, "but the keeping the commandments of "God †." The cauſe is ſufficiently evident;

* Matt. xxiii. 23. † 1 Cor. vii. 19.

Chriſt

Chriſt preached to the Jews, and therefore his religion is founded on and incorporated with theirs, which he did not require them to relinquiſh, in order to accept it, and aſſures them, that he did not come "to deſtroy "their law, but to fulfil it." St. Paul preached chiefly to the Gentiles, but was not commiſſioned to convert them to Judaiſm, in order to their becoming Chriſtians; and therefore we do not find that he, or any of the Apoſtles, impoſed the obſervance of faſts, or any other ceremonials of the Moſaic law, on their Gentile proſelytes.

MATT. X. 29.

Οὐχὶ δυο στρουθια ἀσσαριου πωλειται, και ἑν ἐξ αὐτων ου πεσειται ἐπι την γην, ἀνευ του πατρος ὑμων.

Are not two ſparrows ſold for a farthing? And one of theſe ſhall not fall to the ground without your heavenly Father.

MANY have been the controverſies amongſt philoſophers, in all times, concerning a general and a particular Providence. Some have been of opinion, that the great Creator of all things ſo framed the univerſal ſyſtem, that every part of it is carried on by a regular proceſs of cauſes and conſequences, without his farther interpoſition; and that he cannot interpoſe, without changing the courſe of nature by a miraculous act of divine power, which he rarely, if ever, thinks proper to exert: that both the material and moral world are governed by general laws, which cannot be ſuſpended for the

the ſake of individuals, who muſt therefore ſubmit to this neceſſity, though rewards and puniſhments are not always diſtributed in the preſent life in proportion to their merits; and that a machine ſo conſtituted is a more conſpicuous inſtance of infinite wiſdom and power, than the one which ſtands in need of the continual interference of its author, for regulation and ſupport.—Others have thought, that God not only created the world, but perpetually ſuſtains, invigorates, and directs every part of it; and that, if this energy of divine power was withdrawn but for a moment, the whole would inſtantly be annihilated.—The latter is undoubtedly the truth, and is confirmed by reaſon, ſcripture, and experience. Reaſon teaches us that the revolutions of the vaſt and innumerable celeſtial orbs, through immenſe ſpaces, or the delicate movements in animal and vegetable bodies, can never poſſibly be performed by any principles originally impreſſed on matter by attraction, coheſion, elaſticity, or electricity; becauſe they act in

contradiction

contradiction to them all: and therefore they must be effected by the continual direction of some omnipotent hand: it assures us, that the moral, as well as the material world, must be under the continual influence of the same power; because, without it, the great designs of Providence could never be accomplished. The most important events in life are derived from the operations of matter and will—peace and war, plenty and famine, our health and diseases, our happiness and misery, our safety and destruction. No plan, therefore, could be pursued, if these were all left to the blind movement of the one, or the capricious elections of the other; but, happily for us, they are both under the controul of an omniscient and omnipotent governor, who dispenses them as seems best to his infinite wisdom; and this he can do by a perpetual though invisible influence, without the expence of any miracle; for, if his interference in any event constitutes a miracle, every event is a miracle in nature, because there can be no event without it.

The whole tenour of the scriptures implies

the conſtant ſuperintendency of the Creator over all his works, his continual attention to the moſt inconſiderable, as well as to the moſt important events, to the fall of a ſparrow and to the fall of an empire, to ourſelves, our behaviour, our happineſs and ſufferings, our enjoyments, and our wants; theſe are all repreſented as the effects of his will, and therefore the objects of his knowledge and his care; and on this principle we are every where enjoined to love him, to fear him, to praiſe him, to adore him, to obey his commands, to implore his forgiveneſs, to thank him for his mercy, and to deprecate his wrath.

Experience teaches us the ſame leſſon; and a man muſt be poſſeſſed of very little obſervation, and leſs faith, who does not recollect daily inſtances of the apparent interpoſition of Providence in the detection of crimes, the puniſhment of guilt, and the protection of innocence, which fall within the circle of his own knowledge, and are recorded in the moſt authentic hiſtories of all ages.

MATT. X. 34, 35.

Μη νομισητε ὁτι ἠλθον βαλειν ἐιρηνην ἐπι την γην· ἐκ ἠλθον βαλειν ἐιρηνην, ἀλλα μαχαιραν.

Ἠλθον γαρ διχασαι ἀνθρωπον κατα τε πατρος αὐτε, και θυγατερα κατα της μητρος αὐτης, και νυμφην κατα της πενθερας αὐτης.

Think not that I am to come to ſend peace on earth; I came not to ſend peace, but a ſword.

For I am come to ſet a man at variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in-law.

THIS prophecy of Chriſt was ſoon compleated and dreadfully fulfilled, particularly in that city, and amongſt that people to whom it was ſpoken; for the Jews were ſo far from accepting that pacific and benevolent religion which he taught, that they perverted it into a new cauſe of increaſing thoſe national contentions and private ani-

moſities in which they were then univerſally involved, and were juſtly puniſhed for their enormous wickedneſs, obſtinacy, and incredulity, by the ſwords of their enemies and their own, with ſuch calamities as are unexampled in the hiſtory of mankind. This is an undiſputed fact; but how is it reconcileable with his frequent declarations on other occaſions, and the whole tenour of the New Teſtament, in which Chriſt every where is ſtyled the Prince of peace, and his Goſpel repreſented as introductive of peace and good-will towards men?

The uſual ſolution of this difficulty is this; That ſuch it was intended to be by its benevolent author, but that it was ſo far perverted by the wickedneſs of man, that the effects of it proved to be the very reverſe of its original deſign, and it became productive of all the evils which it was intended to prevent.—But this, I think, is by no means ſatisfactory; becauſe I cannot be perſuaded that the wiſe and beneficent intentions of Providence can ever be defeated by

the folly and wickedneſs of man; their effects, indeed, may ſometimes be delayed by events, which to us may ſeem adverſe, but which, in fact, are neceſſary to their final completion; and this, in the preſent inſtance, I take to be the caſe. The great end of Chriſt's coming was to ſend peace and goodwill amongſt men; and this it has undoubtedly effected to a certain degree: his mild and pacific religion has much abated their native ferocity, cruelty, and depravity, and is making a daily progreſs in this ſalutary work; but he found it neceſſary to ſend with it a ſword, to lop off ſome part of that enormous wickedneſs, which, at its firſt appearance, had overſpread the world, and to make men by their ſufferings capable of its reception; as ſome inveterate diſeaſes will admit of no remedy without a ſevere and painful amputation.

This prophecy of Chriſt, therefore, is not in the leaſt contradictory to his own declarations, or the ſenſe of the ſcriptures, becauſe they relate to different objects; the firſt fore-

tells the many miſeries which he foreſaw men would bring upon themſelves, by the abuſe and perverſion of the religion which he taught them; the latter informs us of the pacific ſpirit and benevolent deſign of that religion, and the ſalutary effects which it muſt ultimately produce on the morals and happineſs of mankind.

MATT. X. 41.

Ὁ δεχομενος προφητην εις ονομα προφητε μισθον προφητε ληψεται.

He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, ſhall receive a prophet's reward.

BY "a prophet" is here to be underſtood, a holy, religious, and good man; and the meaning of the whole ſentence is this:—"He "that receiveth a prophet," that is, he that entertains, aſſiſts, and patroniſes a religious and good man; "in the name of a prophet," that is, becauſe he is, and has the name and character of a religious and good man; "ſhall "receive a prophet's reward;" that is, is entitled to, and ſhall receive as great a reward as the religious and good man himſelf. That he ſhould receive an equal reward is perfectly agreeable to divine juſtice, becauſe, entertaining and patroniſing a pious and virtuous man, from the ſole conſideration of his merit, demonſtrates a heart as much de-

voted to piety and virtue as any action which the worthy object of his favour can possibly perform.

If this is true, the converse must be true likewise; that is, that he that entertains, protects, and patronises an impious, a profligate man, for the sake of his vices, is as criminal, and shall receive as severe a punishment, as the most abandoned of his favorites: and this with equal justice, because the approbation of wickedness in others, having no temptation for an excuse, is more atrocious, and demonstrates a more depraved disposition, than even the practice of it. The seduction of pleasure, the lure of interest, or the violence of our passions, may be some, though a poor apology, for the commission of crimes; but to sit cooly by and view with pleasure the iniquities and profligacy of others, and to encourage them by our favour, approbation, and rewards, indicates a disposition more compleatly depraved than the commission of them: but, depraved as it is, we see instances of it every

day;

day; we ſee the moſt impious and profane, the moſt corrupt and diſſolute, ſometimes the idols of the vulgar, and more frequently the idols of the great; we ſee them, without any introduction or recommendation, except their vices, entertained, careſſed, and patroniſed by the rich and powerful, who look with envy and admiration on a degree of profligacy in them, which they themſelves are unable to arrive at.

MATT. XI. 25.

Ἐν ἐκεινῳ τῳ καιρῳ αποκριθεις ὁ Ἰησους, ειπεν· Ἐξομολογεμαι σοι πατερ, κυριε τε ὑρανε και της γης, ὁτι ἀπεκρυψας ταυτα ἀπο σοφων και συνετων, και ἀπεκαλυψας ἀυτα νηπιοις.

Jeſus anſwered and ſaid, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, becauſe thou haſt hid theſe things from the wiſe and prudent, and haſt revealed them unto babes.

IT ſeems not a little extraordinary, that Jeſus ſhould, in this ſolemn manner, return thanks to his heavenly Father, for having hid from the wiſe and prudent the myſteries of that goſpel, which he himſelf came into the world to promulgate, on the knowledge of which the ſalvation of mankind depended; but this may be very well accounted for by a proper explanation of theſe words.

By the "wiſe," I apprehend, are to be here underſtood, thoſe ſelf-ſufficient reaſoners who

who will believe no divine revelation which does not exactly tally with their own imperfect ideas of truth, nor obey any precepts which are not conformable to their notions of juſtice and the fitneſs of things. By the "prudent," are meant thoſe, who pay little attention to any religion, but are perpetually employed in worldly occupations, and the purſuits of intereſt and ambition. Jeſus, having experienced the obſtinacy and perverſeneſs, with which perſons under both theſe deſcriptions rejected the revelation which he offered them, and at the ſame time the readineſs with which it was thankfully received by the meek, the humble, the teachable, and the innocent, returns thanks to his heavenly Father, (that is, in the form of an addreſs, adores and admires the wiſdom and juſtice of God), for having ſo contrived the nature of the Goſpel, that it was leſs acceptable, and leſs intelligible to thoſe who, from their evil diſpoſitions, deſerved not to partake of the benefits which it confers, than to thoſe who are more worthy to

receive

receive them : and this ſeems to be nothing more than what we all do, or ought to do, which is, to thank, admire, and adore our gracious Creator, for having ſo conſtituted the eſſence of all human vices and virtues, that each are naturally productive of their own puniſhments and rewards.

MATT. XVI. 18.

Και ἐπι ταυτῃ τῃ πετρᾳ οἰκοδομησω μȣ την ἐκκλησιαν.

Upon this rock will I build my church.

FROM this declaration of Chriſt it plainly appears, that he intended to be the founder of a church, that is, a ſociety of perſons believing his divine miſſion, and openly profeſſing the religion which he came to publiſh to mankind; which ſociety ſhould be veſted with the powers and privileges of a corporate body, and exerciſe them under his protection to the end of the world; but we do not find that, by any precepts delivered during his life, or any inſtructions left behind him at his death, he ever communicated to his diſciples any plan of the formation of this church, or any rules for the government of it when formed. The reaſon of which I take to be this:—He knew the adminiſtration of this government muſt fall into the

the hands of men, be blended with their worldly intereſts, and in conſequence be ſoon corrupted and abuſed, and therefore unworthy of divine authority; and that, if he appointed any particular form, or ſpecific regulations for the management of it, he muſt have given ſome degree of ſanction to thoſe future corruptions and abuſes. He knew, likewiſe, that it was unneceſſary; becauſe a community, once eſtabliſhed, muſt naturally produce rule and ſubordination, that is, a government, becauſe it cannot ſubſiſt without one. He inſtituted a church, becauſe, without ſome inſtitution of that kind, his religion muſt quickly have been baniſhed from the world, and known no where but in the cloſets of a few ſpeculative philoſophers, and therefore had little influence on the general conduct of mankind; but he choſe rather to truſt the form and regulations of it to the nature of man, and the nature of government, than to any poſitive command. He did not ordain that when his religion ſhould have ſpread over every quarter

quarter of the globe, this church ſhould become equally extenſive, and be governed by one ſupreme head, his ſucceſſor and repreſentative. He did not command, that in every reſpective country this church ſhould be placed under the dominion of biſhops or preſbyters, of councils, convocations, or ſynods. He has preſcribed no forms of worſhip, except one ſhort prayer; no particular habits for the miniſters who officiate; no places ſet apart for the performance of religious duties, or decorations for thoſe places to excite reverence and devotion in the performers. All theſe he has left to the deciſion of future ages, to be ordered by different communities, in different countries, in a manner that ſhall beſt ſuit the tempers of the people, the genius of their government, and the opinions of the times; provided nothing is introduced inconſiſtent with the purity of his original inſtitution. From hence evidently appears the ignorance and abſurdity of thoſe who reject all eccleſiaſtical authority as human impoſitions, and deny the very

very exiſtence of any Chriſtian church, in contradiction to the expreſs declarations of its founder; and not leſs of thoſe who refuſe compliance with any national religious eſtabliſhment, becauſe they cannot find the form and ceremonies of it exactly delineated and preſcribed in any part of the New Teſtament.

Chriſt has inſtituted eccleſiaſtical, in the ſame manner that God has civil government, that is, by making it neceſſary, without directing the mode of its adminiſtration; becauſe, though the thing itſelf is neceſſary, the mode is not ſo.

MATT. XIX. 4, 5.

Ὁ δε ἀποκριθεις, ειπεν αὐτοις· Ουκ ἀνεγνωτε, ὁτι ὁ ποιησας ἀπ' ἀρχης, ἀρσεν και θηλυ εποιησεν αυτους;

Και ειπεν· Ενεκεν τουτου καταλειψει ἀνθρωπος τον πατερα και την μητερα, και προσκολληθησεται τη γυναικι αὐτου, και ἐσονται οἱ δυο εις σαρκα μιαν.

And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female;

And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

SHOULD there be any controversy concerning the lawfulness of polygamy under the Christian dispensation, this declaration of its author is surely sufficiently decisive in the negative; because, if a man and a woman, by marriage, become one flesh, it seems impossible that a greater number than

than two ſhould be incorporated by that union; and, if a man is commanded to leave his father and mother, and cleave to one wife, he is ſurely not at liberty to cleave to another.

The queſtion here put to Jeſus was not, indeed, concerning polygamy, but divorce; but his anſwer comprehended them both, and declares, by the cleareſt implication, that the firſt ought not to be permitted, and, in expreſs words, that the laſt is abſolutely unlawful in all caſes, except in that of adultery.

The advocates for polygamy alledge, That the practice of it is recorded as far back as hiſtory carries us, to the earlieſt ages of the world; that it was allowed during the whole period of the Jewiſh theocracy, and continued by that people till the coming of Chriſt, and then not prohibited by any poſitive command; and that, therefore, though from a change of circumſtances in the preſent times it may not be expedient, it cannot certainly be unlawful.——This argument has

ſurely

ſurely much weight; but in anſwer it may be ſaid, That, although we do not find it any where in the New Teſtament abſolutely forbid, it is, in this and ſeveral other places, highly diſapproved of by the cleareſt implications; and indeed it is by no means credible, that a cuſtom ſo licentious, ſo injurious to one, and ſo deſtructive to the domeſtic happineſs of both ſexes; a cuſtom, even at that time, rejected by almoſt all the Gentile nations; ſhould be adopted or permitted under the purity of the Chriſtian inſtitution.

The true ſtate of the caſe I take to be this:—Multitudes of the Jews, unable to reſiſt the preaching of Chriſt, and the evidence of his divine miſſion enforced by ſo many miracles, every day became converts to his religion; but, being extremely fond of the ceremonies and cuſtoms of their own, could not ſuddenly be prevailed on to relinquiſh them. Of none were they more tenacious than of this of polygamy, in which they and their forefathers had been indulged for ſo

many centuries, and which had been authoriſed by the example of characters, to whom they looked up with the moſt profound veneration; and therefore many of them, after their converſion, continued in the practice of it.

That they did ſo, ſeems to be confirmed by what St. Paul writes to Titus, that "a "biſhop muſt be blameleſs, the huſband of "one wife;" that is, that although polygamy might be overlooked in ſome of the Jewiſh converts, who could not be prevailed on to accept Chriſtianity on any other terms, it could not be ſuffered in any one who undertook ſo important and ſo ſacred an office as that of a biſhop; whoſe life ought to be exemplary, and his conduct free even from the imputation of all blame.—From hence it appears evident, that polygamy was always conſidered, by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, as incompatible with the religion which they taught; and that, although it might be tolerated in ſome of the Jewiſh proſelytes, who had immemorial cuſtom to plead in its behalf,

half, yet, even in them, it was looked upon as extremely blameable, and was never claimed by or permitted to any of the Gentiles who were converted.

MATT. XX. 15, 16.

Ἢ οὐκ ἔξεστί μοι ποιῆσαι ὃ θέλω ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς; ἢ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρός ἐστιν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαθός εἰμι;

Οὕτως ἔσονται οἱ ἔσχατοι, πρῶτοι, καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι, ἔσχατοι.

Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, becauſe I am good?

So the laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt.

IN order to underſtand this parable of the houſeholder, who paid his labourers not in proportion to the time in which they worked, or the work which they had performed, but according to his own pleaſure; it is neceſſary to remember to whom, and on what occaſion it was ſpoken. Jeſus had juſt before declared, that when he ſhould ſit on his throne of glory, his twelve Apoſtles ſhould ſit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve

twelve tribes of Iſrael. Many of his auditors, who had but lately ſeen theſe men employed in the loweſt occupations, and by no means eminent for their virtues or abilities, thought this a very partial declaration, and this promiſed exaltation far ſuperior to their merits. To theſe this parable was particularly addreſſed; intended to teach them, that all power, glory, and happineſs, are the ſole property of God, and that he alone has a right to diſpoſe of them according to his pleaſure; that all which we enjoy is a free gift from his benevolence, and not a compenſation for our merits; that our merits, if we have any, are derived from him; that even theſe merits proceed from his grace, and the rewards of them from his bounty; that we ought to be thankful for the benefits we receive from his favor, and have no pretence to complain of his partiality, if we ſee greater conferred on thoſe who may appear to us to deſerve them leſs; that we are bad judges of the merits of others, and worſe of our own, and that therefore, in a

future life, many who are now laſt in our eſtimation, will be firſt in happineſs and glory; and many whom we now admire for their virtues, and imagine will be firſt in that ſtate, will be the laſt, that is, leaſt meritorious in the ſight of their juſt and all-diſcerning judge. From whence we may learn, that it is the higheſt preſumption in us to circumſcribe the right of our Creator, in the diſtribution of his favours, by our imperfect notion of fitneſs and equity, to ſet bounds to the operations of any one of his attributes by confronting it with another, to limit his power by the effects of his mercy, or the effects of his mercy by thoſe of his juſtice. His attributes are all above our comprehenſion, and therefore we ought only to adore them in ſilence, and ſubmit to his deciſion with gratitude and reſignation.

MATT. XXII. 21.

Τοτε λεγει αὐτοις· Ἀποδοτε ὖν τα Καισαρος, Καισαρι· και τα τυ Θευ, τῳ Θεῳ.

Then ſaid he unto them, Render unto Cæſar the things which are Cæſar's; and unto God, the things which are God's.

IN order to enſnare Jeſus into offending either their own nation, or the Roman government, under which they were then ſubjected, the Jews ſaid unto him, "Tell "us, therefore, what thinkeſt thou, Is it law-"ful to give tribute unto Cæſar, or not?" A queſtion the moſt inſidious, and moſt dangerous to decide on, that art or malice could have contrived; becauſe, in the deciſion of it, the moſt important political rights were to be determined: Whether they, being a people choſen by God, could lawfully ſubmit to the government of any but God; or ſome one of their own nation, deputed by his

immediate direction?—Whether conqueſt, which is but unjuſt, though ſucceſsful violence, can give a juſt right to govern?—Whether one nation can have a right to rule over, and conſequently to impoſe tribute on another?—And, Whether any ſovereign can lawfully compel ſubjects to pay taxes, without their own conſent? If Chriſt had thought it ever proper for him to give directions on political topics, he certainly would not have neglected this opportunity; but he now, and at all times, induſtriouſly avoided it, and ſaid, "Shew "me the tribute money:" then replies to their queſtion, by aſking them another, "Whoſe is this image and ſuperſcription?" They anſwered, "Cæſar's." Then ſaid he unto them, "Render, therefore, unto Cæſar, "the things which are Cæſar's; and unto "God, the things which are God's."

Many opinions, by the ingenuity of commentators, have been extracted from theſe few words of Chriſt. Some have thought, that, by them, he intended to explode that favorite

favorite notion, that they could not be lawfully governed by any except God. Some have aſſerted, that, by here acknowledging the title of Cæſar, he had eſtabliſhed the right of all conquerors to rule over the people whom they had ſubdued. Others would perſuade us, that, by the things which are Cæſar's, are to be underſtood, taxes impoſed by the ſtate; and, by the things which are God's, the revenues of the church: and it is ſurpriſing, that no courtly divine has undertaken to prove, from this ſhort deciſion, that every ſovereign has a right to ſeize on all the money which bears his image and ſuperſcription. But certainly none of theſe fanciful conjectures have any foundation in theſe words of Chriſt; which are no more than an evaſive anſwer to an inſidious queſtion, and a declaration of what he takes every opportunity of declaring, That he did not come to decide political controverſies, to ſettle the rights of conquerors and the conquered, or of ſovereigns and ſubjects; and that the only inſtructions which he

he could give on that head were, to pay quietly tribute and ſubmiſſion to whatever government they lived under, without unneceſſary inquiries into the lawfulneſs of their claims; but to inquire diligently after the will of God, and pay the ſtricteſt obedience to it on every occaſion.

MATT. XXVI. 39.

Και προελθων μικρον, ἐπεσεν ἐπι προσωπον αὐτε, προσευχομενος, και λεγων, Πατερ με, ει δυνατον ἐστι, παρελθετω ἀπ' ἐμε το ποτηριον τετο.

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from me.

THE hypothetical words, inſerted in this fervent addreſs of Chriſt to his heavenly Father, ſeem to eſtabliſh the truth of two important propoſitions: Firſt, That there may be, and actually are, evils inherent in the nature of things, which even Omnipotence cannot prevent; and, that we have reaſon to conclude, that all which we ſuffer in this life, except ſuch as we bring upon ourſelves by our miſconduct or mutual injuries, are of this kind; that is, ſuch as cannot be prevented without the admiſſion of greater evils, or the loſs of good more than equivalent;

valent; becauſe we cannot ſuppoſe that a Creator of infinite power and goodneſs, would admit any others into any part of his works.

The ſecond propoſition is, That the ſufferings and death of Chriſt are likewiſe of this kind, abſolutely neceſſary as an atonement for the ſins of mankind, and therefore unpreventable by any power, without defeating the great deſign of the benevolent but dreadful taſk which he had undertaken. As ſuch they are repreſented, by himſelf and his Apoſtles, throughout every part of the New Teſtament; not as contingencies, like thoſe of other martyrs in the cauſe of religion, but as an eſſential part of the original plan of his miſſion. From whence this neceſſity ariſes, we have not faculties to conceive: but it muſt be certainly from ſome connections between ſuffering and ſin, that is, between natural and moral evil, totally beyond the reach of our comprehenſions.

Chriſt, under the moſt terrible apprehenſions

henſions of his approaching execution, fell on his face, and prayed, ſaying, " O my " Father, if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs " from me;" that is, if it be poſſible to procure the redemption of mankind without this ſacrifice: but it was not poſſible, and therefore he voluntarily ſubmitted to drink it, as the only means to accompliſh that benevolent end; and, in proof of it, ſays, " No " man taketh my life from me, but I lay " it down of myſelf*." No doubt of its poſſibility could ariſe from any other cauſe, for ſurely it was not only poſſible, but very eaſy, for the power of God to have delivered him out of the hands of man. He might have changed the hearts of his enemies: he might have defeated their malice, by placing him in a ſituation beyond their reach, or by ſending twelve legions of angels to his aſſiſtance: " But how then ſhall " the ſcriptures be fulfilled, that thus it muſt " be†?" that is, How then ſhall the prophe-

* John x. 18.

† Matt. xxvi. 53.

cies

cies and promiſes be fulfilled, which aſſure us, that this important purpoſe can be effected by no other means, nor ſatisfaction made for the ſins of the world on any other terms?

Mark II. 27.

Και ἐλεγεν αὐτοις· Το σαββαθον δια τον ἀνθρωπον ἐγενετο, ϗχ ὁ ἀνθρωπος δια το σαββαθον.

And he ſaid unto them, The ſabbath was made for man, and not man for the ſabbath.

THIS was the reply which Chriſt made to the Phariſees, who had frequently reproved him for healing the ſick on the ſabbath-day; and, in the preſent inſtance, for ſuffering his diſciples to pluck a few ears of corn as they walked through the fields on that day; by which we are to underſtand, that his opinion on this ſubject was, that the keeping holy the ſabbath-day was a wiſe and excellent inſtitution, admirably contrived for the benefit of mankind, but not of ſuch indiſpenſable importance, that we ſhould think it is the chief duty of our lives, or that we were placed in this world on purpoſe to perform it.

The Phariſees were a ſect of the Jews, noted for their ſpiritual pride and hypocriſy, who pretended to extraordinary ſanctity, by a ſtrict and ſuperſtitious obſervance of every ceremony appointed by the Moſaic law, particularly that of keeping holy the ſabbath, with a rigour beyond what the good of ſociety would admit, or the inſtitution itſelf required; and it is not a little remarkable, that the ſectaries of all times have followed their example in this inſtance; they have all thought, or pretended to think, that a rigorous obſervance of this day is the firſt of all Chriſtian duties, and the neglect of it the moſt enormous of all crimes; whereas, properly ſpeaking, it is no Chriſtian duty at all, in any other ſenſe, than that it is the duty of every Chriſtian to comply with every inſtitution, from whatſoever ſource it may be derived, which tends to promote religion and virtue amongſt mankind.

The keeping holy the ſabbath-day was originally enjoined, by a poſitive commandment, to the Jews in the Moſaic law; and,

as ſuch, was obſerved by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, as was every other part of that law, and was afterwards retained by the Chriſtians of all ſucceeding ages, for its peculiar excellence and utility, when all the reſt were laid aſide. But I do not recollect that it is any where injoined by Chriſt or his Apoſtles, or even mentioned in the New Teſtament, except in this and ſome other places in which he reproves the Phariſees for their hypocritical and ſuperſtitious obſervance of it, by converting a day that was intended to be ſet apart for reſt, joy, and thankſgiving, into a ſeaſon of mortification and ſelf-denial of all comforts and conveniences of life.

But this leſſens not the force of our obligation to keep this day in a proper manner; that is, to abſtain from labour and all worldly cares and occupations, and to employ it in acts of devotion, charity, and hoſpitality; for which we have the example of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and of every Chriſtian church from their times to the preſent

day. The excellence, likewiſe, of the inſtitution itſelf cannot fail to recommend it; for, certainly, there never was any other ſo well calculated to promote the intereſts of piety and virtue, to call off the worldly-minded from the perpetual toils of ambition and avarice, and to give leiſure to thoſe who are better diſpoſed, to improve and cultivate thoſe better diſpoſitions; to afford relief to the poor from inceſſant labour, and to the rich from continual diſſipation, and to produce ſome ſenſe of religion in the vulgar, and ſome appearance of it in the great.

MARK VIII. 38.

Ὃς γαρ ἂν ἐπαισχυνθῃ με και τους ἐμους λογους ἐν τῃ γενεᾳ ταυτῃ τῃ μοιχαλιδι και ἁμαρτωλῳ, και ὁ υἱος τε ἀνθρωπε ἐπαισχυνθησε[αι αὐτον ὁταν ἐλθῃ ἐν τῃ δοξῃ τε πα[ρος αὐτε, με[α των ἀγ[ελων των ἁγιων.

Whoſoever, therefore, ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father.

MANY and ſevere are the threats which we find denounced by Chriſt againſt hypocrites; that is, againſt thoſe who pretended an extraordinary ſanctity in their manners and converſation, without having any true ſenſe of religion or morality in their hearts. The words before us are a threat, likewiſe, againſt hypocrites, but hypocrites of a very different ſort; thoſe who pretend to be more profligate than they really are,

and therefore may properly be called hypocrites in wickedneſs. Theſe are much more numerous in the preſent times, and perhaps more miſchievous than the former; as thoſe do honour to religion and virtue by their pretences to them, theſe affront them by an open diſavowal. Thoſe make others better than themſelves, and theſe worſe, by their example. We meet with this ridiculous and criminal kind of hypocriſy every day; we ſee men affecting to be guilty of vices for which they have no reliſh, of profligacy for which they have not conſtitutions, and of crimes which they have not courage to perform. They lay claim to the honour of cheating, at the time they are cheated, and endeavour to paſs for knaves, when, in fact, they are but fools. Theſe are the offenders of whom Chriſt will be aſhamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father; which will be a dreadful but juſt puniſhment, and a proper retaliation of that fooliſh and impious modeſty, which induced them to be aſhamed of him and his word, in complaiſance

ſance to a ſinful and adulterous generation; and to be leſs afraid of incurring the diſpleaſure of the beſt of all Beings, than the profane ridicule of the worſt of men.

MARK XVI. 15, 16.

Και ειπεν αυτοις· Πορευθεντες εις τον κοσμον απαντα, κηρυξατε το ευαγγελιον πασῃ τῃ κτισει.

Ὁ πιστευσας και βαπτισθεις σωθησεται· ὁ δε απιστησας, κατακριθησεται.

And he ſaid unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature.

He that believeth, and is baptiſed, ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.

THIS is the commiſſion, together with the promiſes and threats annexed to it, which Chriſt gave to his Apoſtles when he ſent them forth to preach the goſpel to every part of the world: in which theſe three important queſtions offer themſelves to our ſerious conſideration; What is meant by believing? What is meant by being ſaved? and, What by being damned?—Believing cannot here be underſtood to ſignify the giving

ing aſſent to the tradition of one church, or to the creeds and articles of another, or even to the hiſtorical facts recorded in the New Teſtament; becauſe, at the time when this commiſſion was delivered, no church exiſted, no creeds or articles were formed, nor was the New Teſtament written. Believing, in the language of that book, is for the moſt part uſed as a term ſynonymous to that of becoming a Chriſtian. Thus it is related of the nobleman, whoſe ſon Jeſus had cured, "Himſelf believed, and his whole houſe*;" and thus it is ſaid, that "many of the Jews, "which had ſeen the things which Jeſus did, "believed on him†;" that is, were converted to the religion which he taught, and became Chriſtians; for which purpoſe nothing more was then required, than to acknowledge that Jeſus was the Son of God (that is, the Meſſiah expected by the Jews and foretold by the prophets), and to receive baptiſm as an external and viſible ſign of their initiation

* John iv. 53. † John xi. 45.

into this holy fraternity, which was immediately administered to them on their assenting to this single proposition, as we find it was by Philip to the eunuch, without asking any further questions.

In the next place, What is meant by being saved? In order to understand this expression, it is necessary to recollect that, throughout the New Testament, we are every where informed, that mankind, in the present life, are in a state of guilt and depravity, under sentence of condemnation, and incapable of admission into the kingdom of Heaven; that, in order to redeem them from this unhappy situation, Christ came into the world, and offered them a religion which was effectual for that purpose; and that, whoever shall believe on him (that is, acknowledge his divine authority, accept the religion which he taught, and testify this acceptance by baptism) shall by this, and the atonement made for sin by his sufferings and death, be saved (that is, absolved from their guilt, excused from that sentence, freed from

that

that incapacity, and placed in a ſtate, which, although it may be forfeited by their future miſbehaviour, is, in the language of ſcripture, called ſalvation). This I take to be the true meaning of being ſaved; which, without ſome retroſpect, can have no meaning at all.

By being damned, is not here to be underſtood, being conſigned to a ſtate of everlaſting puniſhment, according to the vulgar acceptation of that phraſe in our tranſlation, in which ſenſe, I believe, it is no where uſed by the writers of the New Teſtament—the original word is καταχριθησεται, *condemnabitur*, which ſignifies ſimply, *will be condemned, or found guilty*, without referring to any puniſhment whatever. In the preſent inſtance, it means nothing more than the reverſe of being ſaved. "He that believeth will be ſaved, but he that believeth not cannot be ſaved;" that is, Whoever refuſes this gracious offer can receive no benefit from it, but muſt remain in the ſame ſtate of guilt, condemnation, and excluſion from the

the kingdom of Heaven, as if no ſuch offer had been made; not as a puniſhment, but as a neceſſary conſequence of his unbelief. This is not a threat, but a declaration; in which there is no more injuſtice or ſeverity, than in that of a phyſician, who, having preſcribed a ſpecific medicine to a patient labouring under an inveterate diſeaſe, aſſures him, that if he takes it, he will certainly recover; but if he will not, he will as certainly die.—This fair interpretation of this paſſage I think a full vindication of the juſtice and goodneſs of God, from the blaſphemous imputations ſometimes thrown on the divine conduct, in condemning his creatures to eternal miſery, merely for not aſſenting to propoſitions which many cannot believe, and more cannot underſtand; for which there is not the leaſt foundation in the words before us.

LUKE XI. 8.

Λεγω ὑμιν, εἰ και ὲ δωσει αὐτῳ ἀναςας, δια το εἰναι αὐτε φιλον, δια γε την ἀναιδειαν αὐτε ἐγερθεις δωσει αὐτῳ ὁσων χρηζει.

I ſay unto you, Though he will not riſe and give him becauſe he is his friend; yet, becauſe of his importunity, he will riſe and give him as many as he needeth.

THIS parable, and alſo another of the importunate widow, in the ſecond chapter, ſeems to repreſent the Deity as teazed into compliance, and granting requeſts, not from the reaſonableneſs of the petition, or the merits of the petitioners, but merely to put an end to their troubleſome importunities. This in man would certainly be a weakneſs, but in the Supreme Judge and diſpoſer of all things is an abſolute impoſſibility; and therefore cannot be the intention of this parable. But, in order to underſtand the ſenſe of this, and many other paſſages in both the Old and New

Teſtament,

Teſtament, we ſhould remember, that, although theſe, as well as other writings of remoter ages, abound in more ſublime ideas, and more beautiful figures, than the compoſitions of later ages; yet we muſt not expect to find in them the ſame correctneſs and preciſion. In their ſimiles, provided there were ſome reſemblance in their principal features, little regard was paid to their diſagreement in all the reſt. Thus the pſalmiſt compares the unity of brethren to the precious ointment on the head of Aaron, which ran down to his beard, and even to the ſkirts of his cloathing; between which there is not the leaſt ſimilitude, except that they were both precious and pleaſant things. In their parables and fables, provided the great outlines correſponded with the moral which they deſigned to inculcate, they attended not to the collateral circumſtances which were introduced into the ſtory; and therefore we ought never to draw any concluſions from them. Thus, in the parable of the marriage of the king's ſon, the king,

king, obſerving that one of the gueſts had not on a wedding garment, commanded him to be bound hand and foot, and caſt into outer darkneſs; by which we are taught, that whoſoever comes to Chriſt, that is, pretends to be a Chriſtian, without the proper cloathing of righteouſneſs and faith, will incur his diſpleaſure, and be ſeverely puniſhed. But we muſt not compare the juſt diſpenſations of Providence, with the unjuſt ſentence of the king, who puniſhed a man for not having on a wedding garment, who had been but juſt before picked up in the highway, and could not have been expected to have been properly dreſſed for ſuch an entertainment.

In like manner, in this parable, the ſole intention is to inculcate the duty of fervent and importunate prayer, together with the deſerved ſucceſs which attends it. This is very well illuſtrated by the perſevering importunity of the petitioner, and the compleat though late compliance of his friend. The motive which at laſt induced him to comply,

comply, after ſo long and obſtinate a refuſal, is a collateral circumſtance, which makes no part of the parable. The parable applies only to the fact, not to the motive which produced it; and therefore that is not to be attended to.

Luke XI. 24, 25, 26.

Ὅταν το ἀκαθαρτον πνευμα ἐξελθῃ ἀπο τε ἀνθρωπε, διερχεται δι ἀνυδρων τοπων ζητεν ἀναπαυσιν· και μη εὑρισκον, λεγει· Ὑποστρεψω εἰς τον οἰκον με, ὁθεν ἐξηλθον.

Και ἐλθον εὑρισκει σεσαρωμενον και κεκοσμημενον.

Τοτε πορευεται και παραλαμβανει ἑπτα ἑτερα πνευματα πονηροτερα ἑαυτε, και εἰσελθοντα κατοικει ἐκει· και γινεται τα ἐσχατα τε ἀνθρωπε ἐκεινε χειρονα των πρωτων.

When the unclean ſpirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, ſeeking reſt: and finding none, he ſaith, I will return to my houſe whence I came out.

And when he cometh, he findeth it ſwept and garniſhed.

Then goeth he, and taketh to him ſeven other ſpirits more wicked than himſelf, and they enter in and dwell there: and the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the firſt.

I KNOW of no paſſage throughout the New Teſtament ſo obſcure as this, nor

one which the commentators have been ſo little able to explain :—for which end, it is in the firſt place neceſſary to obſerve, that, in the times in which the goſpels were written, an opinion was univerſally adopted, both by Jews and Gentiles, that madneſs, idiotiſm, many of the diſeaſes, and much of the wickedneſs of mankind, were occaſioned by evil ſpirits, who got poſſeſſion of their minds and bodies; and that theſe ſpirits, when caſt out by ſome ſuperior power, wandered about in ſolitary and uninhabited deſarts, reſtleſs and miſerable, until they were able to return to their old, or to occupy ſome new habitation.

This paſſage is plainly founded on this idea, and on this ſuppoſition will be found not altogether unintelligible; but may be fairly explained in the following manner :— "When the unclean ſpirit goeth out of a man, he, the ſpirit, walketh in dry places, (that is, wandereth about in dry and ſandy deſarts) ſeeking reſt; and finding none, he ſaith to himſelf, I will return to my houſe whence I came out (that is, to the poſſeſſion

poſſeſſion of the ſame perſon from whom I have been expelled) and when he cometh there, if he findeth it ſwept and garniſhed, (that is, prepared and made ready for his reception by the perſon's relapſe into his former ſtate of depravity) then taketh he to him ſeven ſpirits more wicked than himſelf, and they enter and dwell there (that is, they enter and fix their habitation there, and cannot again be caſt out); ſo the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the firſt."—The meaning of all which, diveſted of metaphor and reduced to common language, I take to be this:—When any one, who has, by the power of reaſon and religion, expelled from his heart impious and malevolent diſpoſitions, infuſed into it by the operations of evil ſpirits, ſhall ſuffer himſelf again to fall under their dominion, they will return with ſevenfold ſtrength, and the man will be many degrees more wicked than he was before.

That evil ſpirits did, in thoſe ages, take poſſeſſion of the minds and bodies of human

beings, we cannot doubt, if we give any credit to hiſtory, ſacred or profane; and, although the ſagacity of the preſent more enlightened times hath exploded this opinion with contempt and ridicule, yet we ſee daily inſtances, which muſt induce us to believe, that their power is not even now totally at an end. We ſee ſome labouring under diſeaſes which the moſt ſkilful phyſicians are unable to account for or to cure; others perpetrating the moſt horrid crimes without provocation, temptation, or advantage: we ſee the hand of the ſuicide plunging the dagger into his own breaſt, in contradiction to his reaſon, his principles, and his corporeal feelings: And muſt we not conclude, that all theſe unaccountable actions proceed from the directions of ſome external powers, which the actors are unable to reſiſt? In madneſs we plainly perceive two diſtinct wills operating at the ſame time, one of which compels a man to commit the moſt outrageous acts, which the other diſapproves, but cannot controul; nay,

ſometimes

ſometimes foreſees, for a conſiderable time, that he ſhall be ſo compelled, but is unable to prevent it.

I cannot conclude this obſervation, without adding another, on the next ſucceeding verſe, in which we are informed, that, "as he "ſpake theſe things, a certain woman of the "company lift up her voice, and ſaid unto "him, Bleſſed is the womb that bare thee, and "the paps which thou haſt ſucked." She had liſtened to his excellent and intelligible diſcourſe for ſome time, which ſhe perfectly underſtood; but when he ſpake theſe things, which were above her comprehenſion, ſhe could no longer forbear lifting up her voice and uttering this pathetic exclamation, to expreſs her applauſe and admiration. This is a picture ſo exactly copied from nature and experience, that we can have no doubt of its truth; and is here only mentioned as a mark of the fidelity with which the moſt minute incidents are recorded by the Evangelical hiſtorians.

LUKE XIV. 10.

Ἀλλ' ὅταν κληθῇς, πορευθεὶς ἀνάπεσον εἰς τὸν ἔσχατον τόπον.

But when thou art bidden, go and ſit down in the loweſt room.

CHRISTIANITY is the beſt-bred religion in the world, although the manners of ſome of its moſt rigid profeſſors ſeem to contradict this aſſertion. There is not a ſingle quality required in the compoſition of a true Chriſtian, which is not equally requiſite in the character of a well-bred man; nor a ſingle deviation from politeneſs, which does not, under the Chriſtian law, become a crime, becauſe it tends to defeat the two great objects of that holy inſtitution, which are to promote peace and good-will on earth, and to qualify us for the kingdom of heaven.

Many were the leſſons by which Chriſt endeavoured to infuſe this amiable virtue into

into the minds of his disciples; in the command before us he forbids every insolent attempt to precedence, as equally adverse to Christianity as to good manners, as it denotes a proud heart and high spirit, inconsistent with the humble precepts of that religion. He says, "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain," that is, In the intercourses of social life, be ready to comply with every innocent proposal, and in every office of civility perform twice as much, as is either required or expected. This, therefore, is Christianity, as well as politeness.—Again, he says, "Whosoever shall be angry with his brother, without a cause," (that is, shall enter into violent, angry, and peevish disputes about nothing) "shall be in danger of the judgment [or displeasure of God]; but whosoever "shall say to his brother, Thou fool! shall "be in danger of hell-fire;" that is, Who shall make use of such opprobrious and affronting expressions as may provoke retaliation and resentment, which may end in violence and

bloodſhed, is anſwerable for the conſequences, and therefore ſhall be in danger of the ſevereſt puniſhment.—Thus we ſee, that every virtue enjoined by Chriſtianity as a duty, is recommended by politeneſs as an accompliſhment. Gentleneſs, humility, deference, affability, and a readineſs to aſſiſt and ſerve on all occaſions, are as neceſſary in the compoſition of a true Chriſtian as in that of a well-bred man; paſſion, moroſeneſs, peeviſhneſs, and ſupercilious ſelf-ſufficiency, are equally repugnant to the characters of both:—who differ in this only, that the true Chriſtian really is what the well-bred man but pretends to be, and would be ſtill better bred if he was.

LUKE XV. 7.

Λεγω ὑμιν, ὁτι ὁτω χαρα ἐσαι ἐν τῳ ὐρανῳ ἐπι ἑνι ἁμαρτωλῳ μετανοουντι, ἢ ἐπι ἐνενηκονταεννεα δικαιοις, οἱτινες ὀ χρειαν ἐχουσι μετανοιας.

I ſay unto you, That joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons who need no repentance.

SOME modern enthuſiaſts entertain ſuch favourable ideas of repentance, as to place it higher, in the catalogue of Chriſtian virtues, than even perfect innocence itſelf. They ſeem to think, that a man muſt be a ſinner before he can be a ſaint; and that, if his repentance be ſincere, his merits will riſe in proportion to his paſt offences. Nay, ſome have gone ſo far as to recommend wickedneſs as preparatory to repentance, and therefore neceſſary to inſure our ſalvation. Falſe and impious as theſe princi-

ples are, they may, perhaps, like moſt errors, have ſome foundation in truth miſunderſtood; for we certainly ſee in this, and many other parts of the New Teſtament, an extraordinary degree of merit imputed, and an extraordinary degree of favour ſhewn, to earneſt and ſincere repentance; although repentance, however ſincere and ſucceſsful, can do no more than place the ſinner in the ſame ſtate as if he had never offended. How then comes it to paſs, that we find here a more joyful reception into heaven beſtowed upon the ſinner who hath repented, than upon ninety-nine juſt perſons who need no repentance? This ſeems to be a diſpenſation not eaſily reconcileable with the wiſdom and juſtice of God; and therefore I do not apprehend that, by theſe words, any preference is given to ſinners who repent, above the righteous who need no repentance, becauſe, in ſuch a ſtate of perfection no human being ever exiſted; and therefore the competition can only lie between thoſe who have committed great crimes,

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of which they are truly ſenſible, and have ſincerely repented, and thoſe who have been daily guilty of many ſmaller offences, of which they are ſo little conſcious as to think they need no repentance. This is clearly exemplified by the parable of the Phariſee and the Publican, who went up to the temple to pray*. The Phariſee, unconſcious of his unworthineſs, thought he needed no repentance, and therefore only thanked God that he was not as other men; extortioners, unjuſt, adulterous, or even as this Publican: the Publican, ſenſible of the many crimes which he had committed, and ſincerely ſorry for them, ſtood afar off, and would not ſo much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but ſmote upon his breaſt, ſaying, "God be merciful to me a ſinner." "I tell you," ſays Chriſt, "this man went "down to his houſe juſtified rather than the "other."

Perhaps, alſo, there may be ſomething in a ſincere repentance for paſt offences, more acceptable to God, and more congenial to

* Luke xviii. 10.

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the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and therefore more productive of joy in heaven, than in any degree of original righteouſneſs of which human nature is capable. The painter and the ſculptor ſhew, that beauty cannot be formed by compaſſes and a rule; a face in which every feature was faultleſs would be ſtiff, formal, and unpleaſing; there muſt be ſome ſmall deviations from exact ſymmetry, to enable it to ſtrike the eye and captivate the heart of every beholder. Juſt ſo in our morals, was it poſſible for any one to act at all times, and on all occaſions, as he ought, his conduct would form a character rather admirable than amiable, unnatural to man, and unlike that of a Chriſtian, becauſe it would certainly be accompanied with ſome kind of arrogance, ſelf-ſufficiency, and independence, inconſiſtent with the lowlineſs, humility, and diffidence, eſſential to that religion. Chriſtianity does not expect that we ſhould be guilty of no offences, but that we be ſorry for them. It does not require perfection, of which we are incapable; but a broken

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and contrite heart, repentance for ſins paſt, and perpetual endeavours after future amendment, which is in every man's power. This is the ſole principle on which this holy inſtitution is founded, and therefore it is not ſurpriſing that there ſhould be extraordinary joy in heaven on every inſtance of the ſalutary effects of it, in the converſion and ſalvation of a ſinner.

Experience teaches us, that we receive more joy from the unexpected return of any good, than from the uninterrupted poſſeſſion of it; from regaining a loſt treaſure, than from its undiſturbed enjoyment; or the recovery of a beloved friend from a dangerous diſeaſe, than from the knowledge of his continual health. This is both natural and rational, Why then ſhould not the angels in heaven be affected with the ſame ſenſations from the ſame cauſe?

LUKE XVI. 9.

Κἀγω ὑμιν λεγω· Ποιησαʃε ἑαυτοις φιλους ἐκ τε μαμωνα της ἀδικιας, ἱνα ὁταν ἐκλιπῃʃε, δεξωνʃαι ὑμας εἰς τας αἰωνιους σκηνας.

And I ſay unto you, Make to yourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlaſting habitations.

NO commentator, ancient or modern, has yet been able to give us a ſatisfactory explanation of this exhortation, delivered by Chriſt to a very numerous audience: the moſt plauſible is this—That by the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, we are to underſtand ill-gotten wealth; and the advice which Chriſt here gives to thoſe who have ſo acquired it, is to employ it in acts of charity and beneficence, by which means, though they fail in other parts of their duty, they may obtain admiſſion into everlaſting life.—This interpretation might do very well,

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if the words would bear it; but it is certainly impoſſible, by any torture, to extract out of them ſuch a meaning; and if ſuch a meaning could be allowed, it would not in the leaſt correſpond with the preceding parable: in order to underſtand which, as well as the words before us, it is neceſſary to recollect, both on what occaſion they were ſpoken, and to whom they were addreſſed.

We find, in the foregoing chapter, that whilſt Jeſus was delivering theſe ſeveral parables to a very great multitude, he obſerved amongſt them ſome Phariſees attending in the crowd; a ſet of men who were perpetually employed in external acts of piety and devotion, and as conſtantly buſied in every ſpecies of extortion and fraud. To theſe Phariſees, equally remarkable for their religion and their roguery, this exhortation was with peculiar propriety addreſſed; in which, I apprehend, we are to underſtand, by the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, the kingdom of Satan; the exiſtence of which was univerſally believed in thoſe times,

times, and is frequently mentioned or alluded to in the ſcriptures, and placed in oppoſition to the kingdom of God. The advice here given to theſe men is this—not to attempt, at the ſame time, to ſerve God and Mammon; but, when they, by their iniquities, have loſt all hopes of admiſſion into the kingdom of light, to ſecure a reception in the kingdom of darkneſs, and to imitate the example of the unjuſt ſteward, in the parable which he had juſt before delivered to them, who, having abandoned all expectations of future ſupport from his lord, on account of his miſbehaviour, and endeavoured to conciliate to himſelf the goodneſs of his tenants, that when he was put out of the ſtewardſhip, they might receive him into their houſes; for which artful precaution his lord commended him, becauſe he had done wiſely, but totally rejected him becauſe he had not done honeſtly.—This, I think, is a juſt and fair explanation of this abſtruſe paſſage; which ſeems to be rather an ironical reproof of the

Phariſees for their hypocriſy and avarice, than a ſerious direction for their conduct, and bears ſome reſemblance to what Joſhua ſaid to the Iſraelites; "If it ſeem evil unto "you to ſerve the Lord, chooſe you this day "whom you will ſerve*:" ſo Chriſt ſays, If you will not be ſubjects of the kingdom of God, make yourſelves friends in the kingdom of Satan.

* Joſhua xxiv. 15.

LUKE XVI. 25.

Εἶπε δε Ἀβρααμ· Τεκνον, μνησθηι ὁτι ἀπελαβες ου τα ἀγαθα σε ἐν τῃ ζωῃ σε, και Λαζαρος ὁμοιως τα κακα· νυν δε ὁδε παρακαλειται, συ δε ὀδυνασαι.

But Abraham ſaid, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedſt thy good things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

ALL the commentators on this parable ſeem to have miſtaken the intention and moral of it; they have all underſtood it, as deſigned only to inform us, that no judgment can be formed of men's condition in a future life, by the appearances in the preſent, of either their proſperity or diſtreſs: that the rich and great will, if criminal, certainly meet with the puniſhment due to their offences, in another ſtate, which, by the influence of their power, they may have evaded in this; and the poor and diſeaſed, if virtuous, will there receive

ceive retribution for all the miſeries and ill-treatment which they have undeſervedly ſuffered. In order to accommodate the parable to this interpretation, they have conſtantly painted the character of Dives in the blackeſt, and that of Lazarus in the brighteſt colours; for which there is not the leaſt foundation in the parable itſelf, as there is not one word ſaid of the criminality of the one, or the merits of the other; Abraham, in his anſwer to the rich man, does not bid him to remember, that he acquired his wealth by fraud or rapine, or that he had expended it in profligacy or oppreſſion; and that, therefore, he ought not to complain of a puniſhment which he had ſo juſtly deſerved. He ſays nothing of the virtues of Lazarus, that he had been pious, ſober, honeſt, and patient; he only anſwers the complainant in a friendly manner, "Son, remember that thou in thy "life-time receivedſt good things, and like-"wiſe Lazarus evil things; but now he is "comforted, and thou art tormented:" by which, I apprehend, he means to addreſs

him:—"Son, although thy preſent ſituation is very wretched, and that of Lazarus no leſs happy, thou haſt no reaſon to arraign the partiality of God; but oughteſt to remember, that thou, in a former ſtate, enjoyedſt all the pleaſures of wealth and proſperity, and that then Lazarus ſuffered all the miſeries of poverty and diſeaſe, but that now he is comforted, and thou art tormented, in conformity to that impartial and eternal law of Providence, which inſtituted the perpetual rotation of good and evil."

From this parable we may learn, that the Supreme diſpoſer of all things diſtributes good and evil amongſt his creatures, not only with juſtice, but with a greater degree of equality than we imagine; and that this he is enabled to perform by having ſo wonderfully contrived the diſpoſition of things, and the conſtitution of man, that riches, power, wealth, and proſperity, in this life, actually lead him into many vices, which will incur puniſhment in another; and ſickneſs, poverty, and diſtreſs, are as naturally productive

productive of many virtues, which will there merit a reward; by which means happineſs and miſery are more equally diſtributed, at the ſame time that ſtrict juſtice is done to every individual according to his deſerts, and no one can have any cauſe to complain.

This idea of the rotation of good and evil, of enjoyments and ſufferings, is confirmed by the cleareſt alluſions in ſeveral parts of the New Teſtament; for inſtance, we there read, that "it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God *;" not becauſe it is criminal to be rich, but becauſe, whilſt riches beſtow on their poſſeſſors many preſent gratifications, they uſually make them proud, inſolent, and profligate, which incapacitates them from becoming members of that holy and happy community. Again, it is ſaid, "Bleſſed are thoſe that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted †;" not becauſe there is any merit in mourning, but becauſe

* Matt. xix. 24. † Matt. v. 4.

afflictions naturally tend to make men humble, ſober, patient, and virtuous in this life, for which they will deſerve and receive a recompence of comfort in another. This wiſe diſpoſition of Providence, in the general courſe of things, although it marks his impartiality, is no impediment to his juſtice, becauſe it lays no one under compulſion, and may be interrupted by the conduct of every individual. The rich are not obliged to be wicked, nor the poor to be virtuous; a rich man may employ his wealth in ſuch a manner in this life, as to acquire happineſs by it in another; and a poor man may be ſo incorrigible as to make himſelf very miſerable in both. All that we are to learn from it is, to take extraordinary care to avoid thoſe crimes to which our ſituation renders us peculiarly liable.

JOHN

JOHN III. 3.

Ἀπεκριθη ὁ Ἰησȣς, και εἰπεν αὐτῳ· Ἀμην ἀμην λεγω σοι, ἐαν μη τις γεννηθη ἀνωθεν, ȣ̓ δυναται ἰδειν την βασιλειαν τȣ Θεȣ.

Jesus answered, and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

THE meaning of which is this:—That mankind are born or come into the world with dispositions so depraved, so prone to anger, malice, revenge, avarice, and ambition, that it is impossible for them ever to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, except they are so totally changed as to become new creatures. No partial alteration will do; it must be an entire change of temper, sentiments, habits, manners, inclinations, and pursuits. All these turbulent and high-spirited passions must be eradicated, and meekness, gentleness, and poorness of spirit, in-

troduced in their room; anger muſt give place to patience, malice to benevolence, revenge to forgiveneſs, and all worldly purſuits to a conſtant habit of piety and devotion. This, in the language of ſcripture, is properly and emphatically ſtyled being born again; becauſe it is a kind of entrance upon a new life, and a commencement of a ſtate entirely different from the former. The neceſſity for this change is ſufficiently evident, becauſe, if men could be permitted to carry theſe evil diſpoſitions with them into the kingdom of God, they would not be happy themſelves, nor ſuffer others to be ſo.

We ſee that even upon earth, if a wicked, malignant, and turbulent man was confined for life, in a virtuous, peaceable, and pious ſociety, it would be no inconſiderable puniſhment; and much more ſevere would it be in heaven, where the contraſt is greater and the duration longer. Wickedneſs and miſery are by nature ſo cloſely united, that they cannot be ſeparated, and therefore neither

ther of them can have a place in the kingdom of God. If any one's diſpoſitions are cruel, malignant, envious, turbulent, factious, and ambitious, though, in contradiction to their impulſe, he ſhould perform all the duties of piety, benevolence, humility, and ſubmiſſion, he could not become a member of this holy and happy ſociety, becauſe his admiſſion would be rather a puniſhment than a reward: before he could attain this ſtate of felicity, he muſt be qualified to enjoy it, and this can only be effected by being born again. How a man is to be born again, Jeſus further informs us in the ſucceeding verſe; he there ſays, "Except a man be born of water and of "the Spirit, he cannot enter into the king-"dom of God;" that is, except a man be born again, by embracing the doctrines and obeying the precepts of his religion, for which purpoſe the external ſign of baptiſm, and the internal aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit, are abſolutely neceſſary. By theſe, together with ſincere repentance and reformation, he

may become a new perſon, and perfectly qualified to be, and to make others happy in that bleſſed community; and when qualified, however great may have been his former offences, he will be readily admitted, and there will be joy in heaven at his reception.

JOHN VI. 44.

Οὐδεὶς δύναται ἐλθειν προς με, ἐαν μη ὁ πατηρ ὁ πεμψας με, ἑλκυση αὐτον.

No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath ſent me, draw him.

MOST of our commentators, apprehenſive leſt the obvious ſenſe of theſe words would lead them into difficulties concerning the grace of God, and the free-will of man, which they were unable to ſolve, have endeavoured to explain them away, and ſubſtitute other ſignifications, for which there is no authority. The true meaning I take to be this:—"No man," ſays Chriſt, "can believe the doctrines, or obey the precepts, which I teach, except he is enabled by the aſſiſtance and grace of God:" by which we are not to underſtand any ſudden irreſiſtible impulſe, as ſome enthuſiaſts would perſuade us; but, except God ſhall be pleaſed to diſpoſe his heart, and alſo the circumſtances

circumſtances of his ſituation, in ſuch a manner as to draw him into the right road of faith and obedience. This is the declaration of Chriſt, and the doctrine univerſally enforced by all the writers of the New Teſtament. St. Paul ſays, "Not that we are ſufficient of ourſelves to think any thing as of "ourſelves, but our ſufficiency is of God *." He ſays alſo to the Philipians, "For it "is God which worketh in you both to will "and to do, of his good pleaſure †". This is the conſtant language of the ſcriptures; in which we are every where exhorted to ſeek, to depend on, to hope for, and to pray for this divine influence on our thoughts and actions, as neceſſary to our thinking any thing right, or performing any thing good: and yet we are conſtantly conſidered, by the whole tenour of thoſe writings, as free agents, poſſeſſed of perfect liberty to do good or evil, and as ſuch we are inſtructed, admoniſhed, tempted by rewards, and threatened with puniſhments. How contradic-

* 2 Cor. iii. 5. † Phil. ii. 13.

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tory ſoever theſe two propoſitions may ſeem, they are both undoubtedly true. Of the firſt we cannot fail of being convinced by reaſon, nor of the latter by experience. Reaſon aſſures us, that no creature can think or act independant of his Creator, in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being, and from whom he receives power to think or act at all; and it ſeems indeed impoſſible that a Creator, however omnipotent, ſhould beſtow on his creatures ſuch a degree of freedom as to make them independent of himſelf: for he muſt infuſe into their original frames ſome diſpoſitions, good or bad; he muſt give them reaſon ſuperior to their paſſions, or paſſions uncontrouled by their reaſon; he muſt endue them with a greater or leſs degree of wiſdom or folly; he muſt place them within or beyond the reach of temptations, and within the view of virtuous or vicious examples. All theſe circumſtances muſt proceed from his diſpenſations, and from theſe their elections and

and conſequent conduct muſt be derived. Of the latter, which is, that we are poſſeſſed of full liberty to chooſe good or evil, to do, or forbear doing, any action; every moment's experience aſſures us with equal certainty. This is not a matter of argument, but of feeling; and we can no more doubt of our being poſſeſſed of this power, than of our ſight, hearing, or any of our corporeal ſenſes.

How theſe two contradictory propoſitions can be reconciled, is above the reach of our comprehenſions, and is but another mark, added to many, of their weakneſs and imperfection. We have no faculties which are able to ſolve this difficulty, and therefore ought to leave it to that omniſcient Being who framed, and is alone acquainted with the compoſition of the human mind. Each of theſe opinions has been ſupported by different ſects of philoſophers, with equal warmth; but it is remarkable, that the Chriſtian is the only religious or moral

moral inſtitution which ever ventured to aſſert the truth of them both; which, as they are both undoubtedly true, ſeems no inconſiderable proof of the ſupernatural information and authority of that diſpenſation.

JOHN

JOHN VI. 53.

Εἶπεν ἐν αὐτοις ὁ Ἰησες· Ἀμην ἀμην λεγω ὑμιν, ἐαν μη φαγητε την σαρκα του ὑιου του ἀνθρωπε, και πιητε αὐτε το αἱμα, ἐκ ἐχετε ζωην ἐν ἑαυτοις.

Then Jeſus ſaid unto them, Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Except ye eat the fleſh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

THESE remarkable words of Chriſt, being the very ſame which he afterwards uſed in the inſtitution of the ſacrament of his laſt ſupper, we cannot but conclude that they muſt have the ſame meaning. Modern expoſitors have, indeed, in both places, explained them in ſuch a manner, as to leave them no meaning at all; they would perſuade us, that they are merely figurative and metaphorical, and think, by eating the body, and drinking the blood of Chriſt, nothing more is to be underſtood, than

than being intimately united to him, by believing his doctrines and obeying his precepts; and that, when applied to the bread and wine received in the sacrament, they mean only that these are symbols of his sufferings and death. But they are surely too expressive, too much insisted on, and too often repeated, to admit of so cold an interpretation; nor is it credible that Christ would have made use of an expression for the sake of metaphor, which shocked his hearers, offended his disciples, and has produced the most violent contentions amongst them from that time to the present hour.

The Evangelists who heard them, and have so emphatically recorded them, had very different ideas of the importance of these words, and so had St. Paul, who reproved the Corinthians who received unworthily, by not discerning the Lord's body; that is, by not perceiving that they were then not eating and drinking bread and wine as their daily food, but something which, by powers supernaturally annexed to

it, would produce the moſt important effects on their preſent diſpoſitions and future happineſs. Our firſt reformers, though they rejected tranſubſtantiation, yet retained the higheſt veneration for this ſacrament, the ſanctity of the elements, and the importance of their effects on the communicants; and I am inclined to think, that they underſtood the ſenſe of the ſcriptures better, and the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity more correctly, than our preſent reformers of reformation. Theſe ſet up reaſon as the meaſure of truth, and then pare away the ſcriptures to make them fit it: thoſe ſearched them with diligence and candour, to find out their true and genuine ſignifications, without any regard to the deciſions of human reaſon; from hence they formed their opinions and doctrines, and from them their creeds and articles; and on this principle we ought to ſubſcribe them—by which we do not aſſert their truth, but their conformity to the ſenſe of the ſcriptures, which they were intended to explain: the truth and

authority

authority of thoſe writings is another queſtion.

Several of our modern divines repreſent the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper as a mere commemoration of his ſufferings and death; by which they entirely deſtroy the end and intent of it: for, although this is a poſitive inſtitution, it is of a moral nature, becauſe it is deſigned to drive the wicked into repentance and amendment; and for this purpoſe it is moſt admirably contrived, becauſe, if they have not totally rejected the Chriſtian ſcheme, it lays them under inſuperable difficulties, as it obliges them either to augment their guilt, by the neglect of a poſitive command, or, by obeying it without repentance and reformation, to ratify their own condemnation. But if theſe very extraordinary words of Chriſt have no meaning, or mean nothing more than a bare commemoration—if conſecration confers no ſanctity on the bread and wine—if thoſe who receive them worthily receive no benefit, nor thoſe who receive them unworthily in-

cur no danger—the inſtitution is vain and uſeleſs, and has no more concern with our religion or morals than the commemoration of gunpowder treaſon, or of any other event recorded in the hiſtory of former times.—Although, therefore, we cannot believe, in contradiction to our ſenſes, that by theſe emphatical words of Chriſt the material ſubſtance of the elements is changed; yet, ſurely, we may believe, without the imputation of credulity, that they have ſome meaning; and that, by them, powers, property, and effects may be annexed to the proper uſe of the ſacrament, which may greatly contribute to our obtaining pardon for our paſt offences, prevent us from falling into future tranſgreſſions, and eſſentially aſſiſt us in our progreſs to everlaſting life.

JOHN

JOHN VII. 46.

Οὐδέποτε ἐτως ἐλαλησεν ἀνθρωπος, ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἀνθρωπος.

Never man ſpake like this man.

I HAVE always been of opinion, that the moſt convincing proof of the divine authority of the Chriſtian revelation may be drawn from the originality of its doctrines, precepts, and the character of its author. This religion teaches us, that mankind come into the world in a ſtate of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, from which they cannot be redeemed, but by the merits and mediation of Jeſus Chriſt, together with their own ſincere repentance, reformation, and faith in him; and that, on theſe terms, God will accept his ſufferings and death, as an atonement for their ſins; but that theſe terms they are unable to comply with, without the ſuperintendency of his grace and aſſiſtance, although they are endued with

perfect free-will, and are accountable for the use of it.—All these doctrines are so entirely new, that they had never entered into the head of any one before, and never any man, but this man, had thought or spake any thing like them. Imposture always puts on the garb of truth, and resembles her as near as she can; but in all these propositions there appears not even a pretence to probability, and therefore, as they cannot be invention, we may reasonably conclude that they must be true.

The moral precepts of this institution are, indeed, similar to those of all others; but in this respect they also are entirely new, that they are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than was ever thought of by the legislators and philosophers of preceding ages. They had some distant prospect of a future state of rewards and punishments, but they saw it through a glass darkly, obscured by clouds of doubt and uncertainty; but this man spake of it with certainty

certainty and authority, removed all the intervening clouds, and ſhewed it in the cleareſt day-light.

The character of the great author of this diſpenſation, is not leſs new than the religion itſelf; there is no inſtance, in the hiſtory of mankind, of the founder of a religion, who propoſed by it no benefit to himſelf, as well as to the world, who intended not to acquire wealth, power, and dominion over his followers; nor an inſtitution in the conſtruction of which this intention is not evidently viſible. But Chriſt diſavows all pretences to ſuch acquiſitions, choſe nothing for himſelf, and promiſed nothing to his diſciples but poverty, diſgrace, ſufferings, and death.

The progreſs of this religion was equally new and unprecedented with all the reſt; for in the courſe of a few years it triumphed over all oppoſition, from reaſon and philoſophy, from principalities and powers, and ſpread itſelf over all the moſt civilized and learned countries then in the world.

This verified the wiſe prediction of Gamaliel; who ſaid to the High-prieſt, deſirous of perſecuting the Apoſtles, "Let them alone; "for if this counſel or work be of men, it "will come to nought; but if it be of God, "ye cannot overthrow it *."

* Acts v. 38, 39.

JOHN

JOHN VIII. 57, 58.

Εἶπον ἐν οἱ Ἰεδαιοι προς αὐτον· Πεντηκονῆα ἐτη ἐπω ἐχεις, και Ἀβρααμ ἑωρακας;

Εἶπεν αὐτοις ὁ Ἰησες· Ἀμην ἀμην λεγω ὑμιν, πριν Ἀβρααμ γενεσθαι ἐγω εἰμι.

Then ſaid the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and haſt thou ſeen Abraham?

Jeſus ſaid unto them, Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

IN this ſhort reply of Jeſus to the Jews, there is ſomething exceedingly remarkable; of which the commentators have taken no notice, though it is ſurpriſing that ſo uncommon an expreſſion ſhould have eſcaped their obſervation.

Had he ſaid, "Before Abraham was, I "was," the obvious meaning would have been no more than this, that he had exiſted from all eternity, and conſequently before the time of Abraham, though he had not

made his appearance in this world before that age which was then preſent; but the extraordinary phraſe here uſed, by applying the preſent tenſe to a paſt event, muſt imply a great deal more, and refer to the mode of that eternal exiſtence. It ſeems, indeed, to amount to a plain declaration, that eternal exiſtence is permanent and unſucceſſive; not compoſed of days, and months, and years, like ours in the preſent life, but one fixed unchangeable point, bearing no relation to time at all; which we have no faculty to comprehend, nor language to expreſs.

If this is the true nature of eternity, of which I have no doubt, this extraordinary declaration is no inconſiderable proof of the ſupernatural information of this extraordinary teacher; becauſe, in the ages and ſituation in which he lived, he never could have acquired ſuch an idea by any human means.

JOHN

JOHN XVIII. 40.

Ἐκραυγασαν ἐν παλιν παντες, λεγοντες· Μη τουτον, ἀλλα τον Βαραββαν· ἠν δε ὁ Βαραββας λῃστης.

Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

IT has frequently been well obſerved, that the Supreme diſpoſer of all things never interpoſes a ſupernatural power, whenever his deſigns can be accompliſhed by ordinary means; that is, by the paſſions and actions of free beings; the effects of which are as certain and uniform, as thoſe of matter and motion; and which, though to us not ſo viſible, are as accurately known by him, who is perfectly acquainted with their frames and diſpoſitions, from whence their actions muſt inevitably be derived.

This is remarkably exemplified in the Evangelical hiſtory of the life and death of

of Jeſus Chriſt; in which we ſee that, in order to aſcertain his divine miſſion, and give a ſanctity to the religion which he taught, miraculous works were every day performed, becauſe this could not have been effected without them; but the whole progreſs of his perſecutions, ſufferings, and death, were left to the ordinary operations of the malevolence, wickedneſs, and ignorance of mankind, the uſual inſtruments which Providence employed to bring about the moſt important events: and by theſe we find that *this*, the moſt important of all others, was effected, without the aſſiſtance of any ſupernatural power; for no ſooner did Jeſus enter upon his benevolent office of inſtructing and reforming mankind, than he was miſunderſtood by ſome, and miſrepreſented by others; he was reviled, inſulted, and perſecuted, his doctrines were called blaſphemy, and his miracles imputed to the devil. In a little time the Jewiſh prieſthood (apprehenſive from his preaching of danger to their church) and the civil magiſtrates

giſtrates (fearful of inſurrection in the ſtate) united to deſtroy him. Falſe witneſſes were ſuborned to accuſe him, and one of his own diſciples was corrupted to betray him. He was then brought before the judgment-ſeat of a Roman governor, who, though he declared that he found no fault in him, yet (fearing to offend the moſt powerful part of the nation over which he preſided, and ſtill more overawed by the name of Cæſar) preferred his own intereſt to the protection of friendleſs innocence, and condemned him to a cruel and ignominious death. But it being cuſtomary, at this time of the paſſover, to releaſe one malefactor at the requiſition of the people, and there being now one under ſentence of condemnation, called Barabbas, this timid judge propoſed an option to the populace, which of them he ſhould releaſe, hoping that they would do that juſtice which he himſelf had not courage to perform. But here a meek and virtuous character had no chance, in a competition for popularity with one who, though a robber, had

had been the ringleader of an inſurrection; and therefore they all cried out, again and again, "Not this man, but Barabbas." All this was but the ordinary proceſs of human wickedneſs, ignorance, and malevolence; and no miraculous interference appears in any part of this tranſaction, becauſe none was wanted. For, certainly, no miracle is requiſite to produce oppoſers of truth, enemies to reformation, perſecutors of innocence, and magiſtracy tenacious of their authority; a prieſthood jealous of their power, a ſervant bribed to betray his maſter, falſe witneſſes, a ſelf-intereſted judge, and a profligate and miſled populace. Theſe are the growth of every age and country in the world, and were fully ſufficient to accompliſh this important and aſtoniſhing event; and will ever remain a remarkable inſtance, that the worſt actions of the worſt of men are ſometimes made uſe of, by the power and wiſdom of God, to carry into execution his moſt beneficent and ſalutary deſigns.

JOHN

JOHN XX. 29.

Λεγει αὐτῳ ὁ Ἰησες· Ὁτι ἑωρακας με, Θωμα, πεπιςευκας· μακαριοι οἱ μη ἰδοντες, και πιςευσαντες.

Jeſus ſaith unto him, Thomas, becauſe thou haſt ſeen me, thou haſt believed: bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.

WHAT! ſays the ſelf-ſufficient reaſoner, are thoſe the moſt bleſſed who believe without proof? And is the merit of faith greater, in proportion as the evidence for it is leſs?—To ſuch queriſts I ſhall only anſwer, That they underſtand not the nature of faith, nor in what the merit of it conſiſts. In the mere aſſent to a propoſition, there is no merit; becauſe, if the proof is obſcure, it is weakneſs; if clear, it is compulſion. It is not the *act*, but the *diſpoſition*, which places faith ſo high in the catalogue of Chriſtian virtues, and renders infidelity ſo criminal. One of the chief

characteriſtics

characteriſtics of Chriſtian charity is, that it believeth all things; becauſe this readineſs to believe muſt proceed from an humble, ſubmiſſive, and teachable temper. Whereas incredulity, when the evidence is ſufficient, generally ariſes from men's vices, and at beſt, from a ſelf-conceited, ſuſpicious, and untractable diſpoſition, which is utterly incompatible with the whole tenour of that religion. This ſeems to have been the caſe of St. Thomas; who is here reproved for not believing the reſurrection of Chriſt, on the poſitive and unanimous teſtimony of all the Apoſtles (with whoſe honeſty and veracity he was perfectly acquainted, and had no reaſon to queſtion) becauſe he had not ſeen him with his own eyes, and felt him with his own hands: and, perhaps, he was not indulged with ſo inconteſtible proof as the reſt had been, in order to try and correct this incredulous and ſuſpicious diſpoſition. If this was really the fact, we may from thence reaſonably conclude, that many things are communicated to us, in the ſcriptures,

tures, in a manner not ſo perfectly clear and demonſtrative as they might have been, for the ſame cauſe, that is, to try and cultivate in us a diſpoſition ſo neceſſary in the compoſition of a Chriſtian.

ROMANS VIII. 29.

Ὅτι ἐς προεγνω, και προωρισε συμμορφες της εἰκονος τυ υἱυ αὐτυ.

For whom he did foreknow, he alſo did predeſtinate.

MUCH unneceſſary labour has been employed, by many learned divines and metaphyſicians, to reconcile the foreknowledge of God and the free-will of man; which never can be at variance, becauſe they have nothing to do with each other. The Apoſtle here ſays, "Whom he "did foreknow, he alſo did predeſtinate;" that is, Thoſe whom he foreknew would be wicked, he foreknows will be puniſhed; and thoſe whom he foreſees will be righteous, he foreſees alſo will be rewarded: but they are not wicked and puniſhed, or righteous and rewarded, becauſe he foreknows it; but he foreknows it becauſe they are ſo. It is impoſſible but that an omniſcient Being,

" in whom we live, and move, and have " our being," muſt foreſee all our thoughts and actions, and the conſequences which attend them, and therefore muſt foreknow our deſtination in the preſent, and in a future life: but his foreknowledge is not the cauſe of it, nor in the leaſt controuls the freedom of our elections, in which we enjoy as perfect liberty as if they were totally unknown; for the mere knowledge of one being, cannot poſſibly have any influence on the actions of another. If any man is well acquainted with the diſpoſitions of another, he may nearly gueſs how he will conduct himſelf on any occaſion; if he knows they are profligate and prodigal, he may reaſonably conclude that he will deſtroy his health, waſte his fortune, and die in an hoſpital or a gaol; this accordingly happens, but not becauſe he had foreſeen it; that could not be the cauſe of this man's miſbehaviour or misfortune; which could be derived only from his own folly and extravagance. What is but conjecture in

man, in God is certain prefcience; but the elections of free agents are no more controuled by the one than the other.——In this, I perceive nothing abftrufe, difficult, or in the leaft inconfiftent with the juftice of God, or the free-will of man. The caufe of all our embarraffments on this fubject I take to be this:—From the nature of human conceptions and human language, we are under the neceffity of applying ideas and expreffions, relative to time, to the exiftence, the attributes, and actions of the Supreme Being; with which they have no kind of relation; which leads us into innumerable abfurdities in our fpeculations on this fubject. With God there is no paft, prefent, and to come: he knows all things equally at all times, and therefore cannot properly be faid to foreknow or predeftinate any thing. This foreknowledge may be to him predeftination; but with regard to us, as it affects not our conduct, it is in a moral fenfe abfolutely nothing.

ROMANS XIII. 1, 2.

Πασα ψυχη ἐξουσιαις ὑπερεχουσαις ὑποτασσεσθω. Οὐ γαρ ἐστιν ἐξουσια εἰ μη ἀπο Θεου· αἱ δε ουσαι ἐξουσιαι, ὑπο του Θεου τεταγμεναι εἰσιν.

Ὡστε ὁ ἀντιτασσομενος τη ἐξουσια, τη του Θεου διαταγη ἀνθεστηκεν· οἱ δε ἀνθεστηκοτες, ἑαυτοις κριμα ληψονται.

Let every ſoul be ſubject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whoſoever, therefore, reſiſteth the power, reſiſteth the ordinance of God: and they that reſiſt ſhall receive to themſelves damnation.

THROUGHOUT the whole New Teſtament we find, that both Chriſt and his Apoſtles were particularly careful to avoid giving any inſtructions concerning government, and on all ſubjects of a political nature; an example which the preachers of his goſpel would do well to imitate

in all times. The paſſage here before us is almoſt the only deviation from this general rule, and is a ſtrong inſtance of the wiſdom and neceſſity of this extraordinary caution; for, although it is nothing more than a general exhortation to obedience, it has at all times been perverted to ſpeak the language, and ſerve the iniquitous purpoſes, of contending parties. The advocates for arbitrary power, and flatterers of princes, have endeavoured to prove from it, that all ſovereigns are veſted, by divine appointment, with uncontroulable authority, accountable for the uſe of it to God alone, from whom they receive it; which no ſubject, however oppreſſed, can reſiſt, without reſiſting the ordinance of God, and incurring a puniſhment due to ſo preſumptuous a crime. —On the other ſide, the friends of liberty, who are enemies to all power in any hands but their own, connect theſe words with thoſe in the ſucceeding verſe, which declare, that "rulers are not a terror "to good works, but to the evil;" and from thence

thence would perſuade us, that whenever a government is ſo much perverted from its original deſign, as to become a terror to good works, and not to evil (that is, whenever it is unjuſtly and tyrannically adminiſtered) it becomes then not only our right, but our duty, to reſiſt it. But in this, as in moſt controverſies, both ſides are in the wrong; for, if the arguments of the former were univerſally to prevail, there could be no liberty, if of the latter, no government, upon earth; but certainly Chriſtianity never intended to make men either ſlaves or rebels. We have here a wiſe and ſalutary injunction from St. Paul, to his diſciples then at Rome, to ſubmit quietly to any government under which they lived, without making any nice inquiry into the rights of thoſe who govern, or factious objections to their adminiſtration; which is not in the leaſt diſpenſed with by the following words; that "rulers are not a terror to good "works, but to evil;" which are added as a farther argument to induce all good men to

ſubmit to and ſupport government, becauſe it is inſtituted for their protection; and we cannot ſuppoſe that the Apoſtle could mean by them to furniſh the Chriſtians with an excuſe for diſobedience, as his whole intention is clearly to enjoin them to ſubmit peaceably to the Roman government, which was then, in the trueſt ſenſe, a terror to good works, and not to evil; and particularly to their good works, for which they were daily oppreſſed and perſecuted. The doctrine of St. Paul is plainly this, That every man ought to be ſubject to the powers that be (that is, to the eſtabliſhed government of the country in which he lives) for this wiſe and pious reaſon, becauſe all power muſt be derived from the appointment, or at leaſt from the permiſſion, of God; and this not only for wrath, but for conſcience ſake, (that is, not only for fear of incurring the diſpleaſure of that government, but as a duty required by him). This alſo is the doctrine of Chriſt himſelf, which he enforced, both by his precepts and example, on all

occaſions. When Pilate ſaid unto him, "Knoweſt thou not that I have power to "crucify thee, and have power to releaſe "thee?" he anſwered, "Thou couldſt have "no power againſt me, except it was "given thee from above;" and therefore he ſubmitted.

There may be caſes in which reſiſtance of the ſupreme power may be juſtified by neceſſity, but ſuch ought never to be defined or pointed out before their arrival; when they come, they will ſpeak for themſelves, and men will be ready enough to hear them. Reſiſtance may ſometimes be practiſed, but ought never to be preached, for we ſtand in need of no leſſons to teach us diſobedience; and therefore we do not find, throughout the whole New Teſtament, one definition or recommendation of civil liberty, nor one command to fight or die in its defence. Theſe may be the glorious atchievements of heroes and patriots; but theſe are not liſted under the banners of Chriſt; the glory, as well as the duty, of his diſci-

ples are, to ſuffer and ſubmit.—We ſhould remember alſo, that by reſiſtance, not only force and open rebellion is here to be underſtood, but all ſecret machinations, and all turbulent and factious endeavours to diſtreſs and impede government, ariſing from motives of ſelf-intereſt, ambition, or diſappointment. Theſe are, in fact, rebellion, with this only difference, that they are more treacherous and cowardly, more likely to ſucceed, and leſs to be puniſhed, and are therefore equally forbid under the denunciation of the ſame tremendous penalty.

1 CORINTHIANS I. 10.

Παρακαλω δε ὑμας, ἀδελφοι, δια τυ ὀνομαϛος τυ Κυριυ ἡμων Ἰησυ Χριϛυ, ἱνα το αὐτο λεγῆϛε πανϛες, και μη ἡ ἐν ὑμιν σχισμαϛα.

Now I beſeech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing, and that there be no diviſions among you.

FROM theſe words of St. Paul, it is evident, that many different opinions, and many controverſies concerning them, had found their way into the Chriſtian churches, at ſo early a period as his life-time. Theſe he endeavoured to ſuppreſs, by thus enjoining them to ſpeak the ſame things; that is, to ſettle ſome uniform rule of faith and mode of worſhip, aſcertained by ſomething like creeds or articles, to which they could all aſſent; without which, no rule of faith, or form of worſhip, could be eſtabliſhed, nor diviſions amongſt them be prevented,

vented, deſtructive to every community civil or religious. It is true, indeed, that at the firſt promulgation of the goſpel, Chriſt himſelf impoſed no ſuch on his diſciples, who chiefly conſiſted of the moſt ignorant and illiterate vulgar, from whom nothing more was required than the bare acknowledgment that he was the Son of God, or the Meſſiah, who had been long expected. As this is but a ſingle propoſition, no difference of opinion concerning it could ariſe amongſt thoſe who believed, and therefore there could be no occaſion for any teſts to reconcile them. In a little time the great, the wiſe, and the learned ſages and philoſophers became proſelytes, and brought with them a variety of opinions from their reſpective ſchools in which they had been educated; which were blended with the doctrines of Chriſt, and very ſoon corrupted the purity of his religion. It then became neceſſary to fix ſome ſtandard of truth, to which every Chriſtian might reſort; and when theſe doctrines were committed to writing,

ing, in the books of the New Teſtament, from the uncertainty of all human language, and the various interpretations which they will admit of, this neceſſity was greatly increaſed, and is daily increaſing by time, which every day introduces new errors, and new diſputes about them; ſo that it ſeems impoſſible, that, without ſome teſt, any religion can be eſtabliſhed in any country; and without ſome eſtabliſhment no national religion can ſubſiſt at all.

Hence appears the abſurdity of thoſe who would reject all religious teſts, becauſe Chriſt impoſed none on his diſciples when there were no errors to encounter nor controverſies to decide, and therefore none were wanted: to reject them now, becauſe they were then unneceſſary, is as ridiculous as to explode the uſe of all medicines, becauſe none were adminiſtered before any diſeaſes had made their appearance. But, ſay ſome, If teſts are neceſſary, let them be as comprehenſive as poſſible; a declaration that we believe the ſcriptures, would be fully ſufficient.

ficient. They ought, undoubtedly, to be as comprehenſive as the end of their inſtitution will admit; which is, to exclude all thoſe from a community, whoſe principles muſt induce them to betray and ſubvert it: but ſuch a declaration would, by no means, anſwer this purpoſe, becauſe our diſputes are not about the truth, but the meaning, of thoſe writings; and we ſee many who believe, or pretend to believe, them, and yet deny their aſſent to every material doctrine which they contain, and juſtify their diſſent by their own interpretations: a teſt, therefore, muſt ſpecify and decide upon the particular doctrines which are diſputed, or it is entirely uſeleſs and ineffectual. Such are the articles of our church, interpretations of the ſenſe of the ſcriptures, and explanations of the doctrines therein contained; as ſuch only we ſubſcribe them, not as objects of our reaſon or belief, any farther than we believe them to be ſo. This, ſurely, is very different from aſſerting their truth in the firſt inſtance; this depends on the veracity of the books

books which they profeſs to explain; and this on many other different conſiderations, as the authenticity of thoſe writings, the inſpiration, and degrees of inſpiration, of their authors, and the purity of their preſervation; with all which, in ſubſcribing to theſe articles, we have nothing to do. All that is incumbent on us is, to compare them with the books themſelves, which, if we fairly and candidly perform, I am perſuaded, we ſhall find them more conſonant with their real and genuine ſenſe, and more expreſſive of their true meaning, than modern theological language and ideas will admit of. The compilers never conſidered whether they are conformable to reaſon; if they expreſſed the true ſenſe of the ſcriptures, this was all they intended.

1 CORINTHIANS I. 25.

Ὅτι τὸ μωρὸν τȣ̃ Θεȣ̃, σοφώτερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστί.

The fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men.

THERE is ſomething, at firſt ſight, in this expreſſion, indecent, if not impious; but it means no more than this; that the doctrines of Chriſtianity, revealed by God, though they were "to the Jews a "ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſh-"neſs," are wiſer (that is, better fitted to inſtruct mankind in the principles of true religion and ſound morality) than all the theological leſſons of the Rabbis of the one, or the Philoſophers of the other. St. Paul, who ſays this, was, perhaps, as great a maſter of reaſon as any man of his own or of all ſucceeding ages; but he never employed it on ſubjects to which it cannot properly be applied: he never endeavours by it to explain the myſteries of the Chriſtian religion,

or

or to reject them because he is not able; he believed them himself, and taught them to others, just as they had been delivered by his Lord and master, without attempting to reconcile them to his own reason, or that of his disciples.

Christ frequently declared, that all mankind come into this world in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation; that he was the Messiah, or the Son of God, who came to instruct and reform them, and to lay down his life as a propitiation for their transgressions; and that his heavenly Father, on their sincere repentance, would accept his sufferings and death as an atonement for their sins: that they were free agents, and as such accountable for their conduct; and yet constantly asserts, that they can do nothing of themselves, but that all their thoughts and actions must proceed from the influence of God, "in "whom they live, and move, and have their "being." These doctrines appeared to the learned philosophers of Rome and Athens

to

to be fooliſhneſs (that is, abſurdities, contradictory to every principle of human reaſon) and ſo they muſt have done to St. Paul, had he brought them before the ſame tribunal; but he never preſumed to ſet up human reaſon as a judge of divine diſpenſations. He pretended not to controvert the truth of theſe doctrines, by arguing, that it was never poſſible that a wiſe, benevolent, and juſt Creator ſhould call into being creatures in a ſtate of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, and puniſh them for what they could not prevent; nor that, if they could be criminal, he ſhould accept the ſufferings of the innocent as a ſatisfaction for the crimes of the guilty: nor did he alledge, that Omnipotence itſelf could not create beings at the ſame time free agents, yet under perpetual influence and direction: all theſe doubts and difficulties he left to the diſcuſſion of the reaſoning divines and philoſophers of later ages; for himſelf, he was ſatisfied of the truth of theſe doctrines, by the authority from whence they were derived;

rived; and as ſuch, has tranſmitted them to us, in words as clear and explicit as the power of language can furniſh. He does not attempt to explain theſe myſteries, nor enters into any metaphyſical ſpeculations on the abſtract nature of guilt and puniſhment, of ſufferings or atonement, of free will, predeſtination, and divine influence. He aſſerts the facts only as he received them; which is all of which, in our preſent ſtate, we can be informed.

1 Corinthians VII. 27.

Λελυσαι ἀπο γυναικος; μη ζητει γυναικα.

Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.

St. Paul, throughout this whole chapter, recommends celibacy to Christians of both sexes, as most acceptable to God, and most consistent with the purity of their religion. Commentators, I know, in order to extricate themselves from some difficulties, have represented this advice but as local and temporal, occasioned only by the distresses and persecutions under which the Christian churches at that time laboured: but, if we believe his own words, we must see that this was not his only, nor yet his principal reason for giving it; but that he meant it generally, because he was of opinion that marriage, in Christians of both sexes, multiplied their attachments, and increased their cares concerning worldly affairs, and consequently diverted their attention from the

sole

ſole object of their profeſſion, which is the attainment of everlaſting life. He ſays, "I would have you without carefulneſs. He "that is unmarried careth for the things "which belong to the Lord; but he that "is married careth for the things of the "world, how he may pleaſe his wife.—The "unmarried woman careth for the things of "the Lord, that ſhe may be holy both in "body and in ſpirit; but ſhe that is married "careth for the things of the world, how ſhe "may pleaſe her huſband." For this reaſon, St. Paul here ventures to avow a doctrine contradictory to the moral and political ſentiments of the wiſeſt philoſophers and legiſlators of all times, deſtructive of domeſtic happineſs and national proſperity, and which, if univerſally adopted, would eradicate the human ſpecies from the face of the earth.

From hence, if we believe that this great Apoſtle underſtood the ſpirit of the religion which he taught, we cannot avoid drawing this concluſion—That there may be actions,

the performance of which may eſſentially contribute to raiſe individuals nearer to Chriſtian perfection, and to qualify them for happineſs in a future life, which may yet widely differ, both in their principles and their end, from moral virtues, and which, if univerſally practiſed, would be exceedingly detrimental to mankind in their preſent ſtate.

Of theſe celibacy is one; which, though deſtructive of the happineſs, and even of the exiſtence of mankind, may yet give leiſure to ſome few individuals to carry their piety, devotion, virtue, and reſignation, to a more exalted height than can be arrived at, under the many cares, connections, and embarraſſments incident to the married ſtate. In like manner, to ſell all that a man hath, and give it to the poor, is an act which, if generally practiſed, muſt put an end to all trade, manufactures, and induſtry, and introduce univerſal idleneſs and want; yet, the performance of it muſt proceed from ſo extraordinary a degree of faith, obedience, and

ſelf-denial,

ſelf-denial, that it may deſerve, and receive, an extraordinary reward. Precepts of this ſort, I apprehend, are not enjoined, but only occaſionally flung out, to teach us the nature of Chriſtian perfection; which is ſo adverſe to the world, and all its œconomy, purſuits, and occupations, that we are neither required or expected to attain it in our preſent ſtate, but ought to make as near approaches to it as our natural depravity and imperfection will permit.

From hence I am inclined to think, that, if monaſtic inſtitutions were really what they pretend to be, voluntary retreats from all worldly cares, occupations, and connections, wholly appropriated to religious contemplation, piety, and devotion, they might confer very eſſential benefits on the very few individuals who are capable of receiving them, without any detriment to the buſineſs or population of the world. But the great objection to them is this—that they are not made for man, nor man for them. The generality of mankind are formed for

action, and not for contemplation, and come into the world to do its buſineſs, without perceiving the folly and inſignificance of what they are employed in. If multitudes, therefore, are confined in theſe gloomy manſions, in contradiction to their inclinations and diſpoſitions, they muſt ſoon become, like other priſons, ſeminaries of ignorance, lazineſs, profligacy, and vice.

1 CORINTHIANS XIII. 4, 5, 6, 7.

Ἡ ἀγαπη μακροθυμει, χρηςευεται· ἡ ἀγαπη ὐ ζηλοι· ἡ ἀγαπη ὐ περπερευεται, ὐ φυσιεται,

ὐκ ἀσχημονει, ὐ ζητει τα ἑαυτης, ὐ παροξυνεται, ὐ λογιζεται το κακον,

ὐ χαιρει ἐπι τη ἀδικια, συγχαιρει δε τη ἀληθεια.

παντα ςεγει, παντα πιςευει, παντα ἐλπιζει, παντα ὑπομενει.

Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

IN this inimitable portrait of Charity, drawn by the maſterly hand of St. Paul,

we find every virtue which conſtitutes the character of a Chriſtian, who is a candidate for the kingdom of heaven; in which it is remarkable, that there is not one, which is not peculiarly calculated to qualify men to become members, and to enjoy and contribute to the felicity, of that holy and happy ſociety.

" Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind;" that is, is patient, meek, and benevolent, qualities the moſt eſſential to ſocial happineſs. " Charity envieth not;" for, as the envious are miſerable, in proportion to the happineſs they ſee others enjoy, they would be more miſerable in heaven than they are upon earth. " Charity vaunteth not itſelf, " is not puffed up;" becauſe nothing ſo much diſturbs the peace of ſociety, as pride, inſolence, and ambition. " Doth not be- " have itſelf unſeemly;" that is, is not in converſation ill-bred, ſelf-ſufficient, diſputatious, and overbearing; offences, perhaps, more adverſe to ſocial happineſs, than many crimes of a more enormous kind. " Seeketh " not her own, is not eaſily provoked;" that is,

is, rather chuſes to give up ſome part of her property, to which ſhe has an undoubted right, than be the cauſe of conteſts, animoſities, and litigations, and is not eaſily provoked to enter into them, either by intereſts or reſentment. " Thinketh no evil;" that is, ſuſpects no evil intentions in the hearts of others, as ſhe feels none in her own. " Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in " the truth;" that is, takes no pleaſure in any kind of wickedneſs, nor ſees it with approbation in others; but is happy in the practice of every virtue which is preſcribed by reaſon and truth, and rejoiceth to ſee others follow her example. " Beareth all things," all injuries and inſults, without anger, or a wiſh for revenge or retaliation. " Believeth all things," becauſe meek, docile, diffident of her own judgment, and unſuſpicious of fraud and impoſition. " Hopeth all things," however unfavourable are their preſent appearances, will turn out for the beſt; and therefore " endureth all things," pain, ſickneſs, poverty, and misfortunes, with patience, and perfect reſignation to the will of God.

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We have here a compleat catalogue of all thoſe virtues and diſpoſitions, which are neceſſary to qualify a Chriſtian for the kingdom of heaven; in any one of which, if he is deficient, he muſt infallibly be excluded, however eminent his merits may be of another kind; of this the ſame Apoſtle aſſures us, who ſays, "Though I ſpeak with the "tongues of men and angels, and have not "charity, I am become as ſounding braſs, or "a tinkling cymbal; and though I have the "gift of prophecy, and underſtand all myſ-"teries, and all knowledge, and though I "have all faith, ſo that I could remove "mountains, and have not charity, I am "nothing. And though I beſtow all my "goods to feed the poor, and though I "give my body to be burned, and have not "charity, it profiteth me nothing;" that is, in regard to my attainment of the kingdom of heaven; becauſe there neither eloquence, nor prophecy, nor theological knowledge, nor faith, nor martyrdom, nor bounty to the poor, are wanted; but only ſuch a

meek, humble, patient, peaceable, forgiving, and benevolent temper and behaviour, as is here ſpecified under the denomination of charity, which alone can enable us to communicate and participate happineſs, either in the preſent or a future ſtate.

1 CORINTHIANS XIII. 11.

Ὅτε ἤμην νηπιος, ὡς νηπιος ἐλαλεν, ὡς νηπιος ἐφρονεν, ὡς νηπιος ἐλογιζομην· ὁτε δε γεγονα ἀνηρ, κατηργηκα τα τε νηπιε.

When I was a child, I ſpake as a child, I underſtood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childiſh things.

IF we trace a man through the different periods of his life, from the cradle to the grave, he appears in ſuch a variety of ſhapes, that we can ſcarcely believe him to be the ſame creature. At firſt he is an helpleſs infant in his nurſe's arms, without ſpeech, underſtanding, or thought; then he is a child, ſpeaking as a child, underſtanding as a child, thinking as a child. He is next a rude, unformed, impetuous ſchool-boy; and then transformed into a youth, graceful, amiable, and amorous. At length, arrived at compleat

pleat manhood, he puts away childiſh things, and becomes a philoſopher, a warrior, or a ſtateſman. We then find him meaſuring out the heavens, inveſtigating other worlds, or buſied in the occupations of this. We ſee him commanding fleets or armies, or haranguing at the bar, in the pulpit, or the ſenate; and at laſt returning back to his primitive ſtate of childhood and imbecility. Yet, under all theſe characters, he is but the ſame ſingle individual.

In what this identity conſiſts, or where it reſides, it is by no means eaſy to aſcertain. It cannot be in the body, becauſe every naturaliſt knows that the component parts of the body are in perpetual motion, are continually diſcharged by various evacuations, and replaced by the particles of our daily food; ſo that, in the courſe of a few years, not a ſingle atom of our original frame can poſſibly remain. If a man loſes a leg or an arm, or even both legs

legs and arms, he is not leſs the ſame perſon; and therefore we have reaſon to conclude, that his identity would not be affected by the loſs of his whole body; and therefore in that it cannot reſide.

It cannot be in the mind, becauſe the changes of the mind are as great and as frequent as thoſe of the body, throughout the different ſtages of human life; the ideas of a man and thoſe of a child are as unlike as his features and his ſtature; at different ages we put away all our former modes of thinking and acting, and adopt new opinions, purſuits, inclinations, and attachments. Many diſeaſes deſtroy all our mental faculties, derange our reaſon, extinguiſh our conſciouſneſs, and obliterate our memories; and yet our identity remains unimpaired. If, therefore, it is not to be found either in the body or the mind, there muſt be ſome permanent principle in the human compoſition, in which it does reſide, totally unaffected

unaffected by the continual alterations of them both;—and this, I think, is a new and unanſwerable proof of the exiſtence and duration of the ſoul.

1 CORINTHIANS XIII. 12.

Βλεπομεν γαρ αρτι δι εσοπτρυ εν αινιγματι.

For now we ſee through a glaſs, dark'ly.

SO darkly, indeed, do we ſee the things of a future life, and ſo erroneouſly thoſe of the preſent, that we form very falſe eſtimates of them both; and act ſtill more abſurdly than we judge. There are, who not convinced that there will be a future ſtate of retribution after death, and none who know not that the death of every man may be inſtantaneous, and cannot be far off; and yet they take no care to prepare themſelves for the former, and think ſo little of the latter, that, on any unexpected event, it is become proverbial to ſay, I thought of it no more than of my dying day. We fear nothing ſo much as death; and yet there is nothing which we think of ſo little. We are more tenacious of riches the leſs we want them, and toil away the beſt part of our

our days to enable us to paſs a few in a quiet leiſure, which no man could ever enjoy who had ever been buſy. We infuſe into our children the ſame falſe ideas, and thus tranſmit abſurdities from generation to generation. We educate them all for this life; there is not one ſchool for the next. "What man is there of you," ſays Chriſt, "who, if his ſon aſk for a fiſh, will give him "a ſerpent*?" few, indeed, with regard to this world, are ſo fooliſh or ſo cruel, but, with regard to another, it is univerſally practiſed. Every prudent parent endeavours to infuſe into his ſon the wiſdom of the ſerpent, rather than the innocence of the fiſh. He ſpares no pains to qualify them for the higheſt poſts in the kingdom of the earth, but his ambition extends not, like that of the mother of Zebedee, to gain them rank in the kingdom of heaven. Do we hear any father, however worthy and reſpectable, thus addreſs his ſon, in the lan-

* Matt. vii. 10.

guage of a philoſopher and a Chriſtian? I ſhall leave you, my ſon, an eſtate, ſmall indeed in the eſtimation of the world, but ſufficient to afford you, not only the neceſſaries but the comforts of life, and even to adminiſter them to the wants of others: waſte it not in vice and extravagance, nor yet labour to increaſe it by frauds and rapine, nor even by honeſt induſtry in profeſſions which will not allow you leiſure, either to enjoy this life or prepare for another; but, above all other methods, ſeek not to augment it by a mercenary marriage, which cannot fail to lead you into an inextricable labyrinth of wickedneſs and miſery; and remember, that mutual fidelity and affection will give you more happineſs than wealth is able to beſtow.

The very reverſe of this is the leſſon inculcated by every prudent parent, and ratified by univerſal approbation.—My ſon, he ſays, you will inherit an ample fortune; but let not this tempt you to ſit down quietly in an indolent inſignificance: there are a variety

a variety of methods by which you may improve it, and advance yourſelf in the world; by a diſcreet marriage, you may double it, if you do not fooliſhly ſacrifice your intereſts; the law, the church, and the army are all open to your endeavours, and may reward them with the higheſt poſts of honour and profit: the Eaſt and the Weſt are ſtill unexhauſted, and ready to pour their treaſures into the laps of the brave and enterprizing. By ſuch inſtructions are the ſeeds of avarice and ambition ſown in the minds of youth, which afterwards infallibly produce the bitter fruits of iniquity and diſappointment.

That mankind ſhould thus continue, through all ages and generations, to think, ſpeak, and act in contradiction to their reaſon, their principles, and their intereſt, is a wonderful phænomenon; which can be occaſioned ſolely by this ſingle circumſtance, that they "ſee through a glaſs, "darkly:" whenever they ſee clearly, they ſeldom judge wrong; the defect is not in

their reaſon, but in their knowledge; every one would purſue his own intereſt, if he knew what it was, and, in fact, every one does purſue it, but the generality totally miſtake it. No man would chooſe riches before happineſs, power before quiet, or fame before ſafety, if he knew the true value of each: no man would prefer the tranſitory and worthleſs enjoyment of this world to the permanent and ſublime felicity of a better, if he had a clear proſpect of them both; but we ſee the former through a miſt, which always magnifies, and the latter appears to be at ſo great a diſtance, that we ſcarce ſee it at all; and therefore it makes little impreſſion on our ſenſes, and has as little influence on our conduct.

Why our all-wiſe and benevolent Creator ſhould have thought proper thus to preſent all objects to our view, "through a glaſs, "darkly," is one of the many divine diſpenſations for which we are unable to account; but this we may know, that if we ſaw the things of this world clearly, and in a true

a true light, the buſineſs and œconomy of it, conſtituted as it is, could not go on; our purſuits would all be at an end, when we ſaw there was nothing worth purſuing, our hopes would vaniſh, our expectations be extinguiſhed, and an univerſal ſtagnation would enſue: and from hence we have reaſon to conclude, that a diſtinct proſpect of the things of another world, while we reſide in this, would be equally detrimental to the well being of both.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 8.

Το λοιπον, ἀδελφοι, ὁσα ἐστιν ἀληθη, ὁσα σεμνα, ὁσα δικαια, ὁσα ἁγνα, ὁσα προσφιλη, ὁσα ευφημα, εἰ τις ἀρετη και εἰ τις ἐπαινος, ταυτα λογιζεσθε.

Finally, brethren, whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praiſe, think on theſe things.

IT is not, I think, a little ſurprizing to ſee many Chriſtian divines, of the firſt learning and abilities, employing that learning and thoſe abilities, and much of their time, in framing laborious ſyſtems of ethics from the law of nature, whilſt they have the books of the New Teſtament continually lying open before their eyes. In Plato and Ariſtotle, in Cicero and Seneca, this was a laudable and uſeful undertaking; but,

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in a Chriſtian, it is neither uſeful or meritorious, nor wiſer than if any one ſhould chuſe to ſhut his eyes in the brighteſt daylight, only to try if he was able to grope out his way in the dark. It is now as impoſſible for any man to form a religious and moral inſtitution by the mere efforts of human reaſon, as to ſee by a farthing candle in the midſt of a meridian ſunſhine. He muſt unavoidably adopt the doctrines and precepts of the Goſpel, and then miſtake them for his own. If his own are true and juſt, they muſt be exactly the ſame; and if they differ, they are unworthy of notice. If we believe the doctrine and precepts tranſmitted to us in the New Teſtament to be a revelation from God, we cannot, without preſumption, ſearch out for any other, nor even accept the ſame on an inferior authority. Whatever may be their authority, their unrivalled excellence is indiſputable. The moral leſſons of Chriſt are all ſo conciſe, ſo clear, ſo perſuaſive, ſo unencumbered with definitions

and inquiries, and enforced by parables ſo appoſite and inſtructive, as brings them nearer to our hearts, and renders them not only ſuperior to, but unlike all which had ever before been publiſhed to the world. In omitting all unneceſſary diſquiſitions on moral and religious ſubjects, the Apoſtles imatated the example of their maſter. In the paſſage now before us, St. Paul, writing to the brethren at Philippi, enjoins them to think on, that is, not to forget to practiſe, "whatſoever things are true, whatſo-"ever things are honeſt, whatſoever things "are juſt, whatſoever things are pure." He takes it for granted, that thoſe to whom he wrote, as well as all mankind, knew what things are true, honeſt, juſt, and pure; and therefore he enters not into any metaphyſical inquiries into the abſtract nature of truth, honeſty, juſtice, and purity, which are always uſeleſs, and ſometimes detrimental, as they never induce men to be virtuous, and ſometimes ſerve to furniſh them with excuſes for vices. Men want not knowledge

ledge of their duty, but inclination to perform it. A definition of virtue will never make any one leſs profligate, nor an enquiry concerning the origin of property make any one more honeſt; no more than a diſſertation on optics will make a man ſee, or a receipt for diſtilling brandy or brewing ſtrong beer will make him ſober.

2 THESSALONIANS II. 11.

Και δια τετο πεμψει αὐτοις ὁ Θεος ἐνεργειαν πλανης, εἰς το πιστευσαι αὐτες τῳ ψευδει.

And for this cauſe God ſhall ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a lie.

IN this, and ſeveral other places in both the Old and New Teſtament, God is repreſented as leading men into errors deſtructive to their innocence and happineſs, ſometimes by his own, and ſometimes by the influence of intermediate ſpirits. How is this reconcileable with his juſtice and goodneſs? How can any evil proceed from infinite goodneſs, or any deluſion from the fountain of all truth? No commentator or preacher on theſe texts, that I know of, has yet been able to anſwer theſe queſtions in a manner ſatisfactory to reaſon or common ſenſe

But this difficulty, like moſt others in our interpretations of ſcripture, ariſes from our

own ignorance and our inſenſibility of it. We boldly and preſumptuouſly aſſert, that God cannot do one thing, and that he will not do another, becauſe ſuch things ſeem to us to be inconſiſtent with thoſe attributes which we have thought proper to beſtow upon him; but we know ſo little of the nature of good and evil, of truth or falſhood, of God or man, or of the relations between a Creator and his creatures, that we are utterly incapable to preſcribe limits to his power, or rules to his will; as well might a worm pretend to decide on the councils of princes, and the policies of empires, as man to paſs judgment on the diſpenſations of the Almighty. We ſay, God cannot be the cauſe of any evil; but we know not what is evil; he may be, and is, the cauſe of many things which appear, and really are, evils to us, however they may be neceſſary to the production of univerſal good. We ſay, he cannot be the cauſe of any deluſion; but why not? truth is by no means the criterion of virtue, as

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ſome philoſophers would perſuade us; deluſion, in itſelf, is neither good or evil; its merit or criminality depends on the end for which it is intended: it is no crime to deceive men for their entertainment, much leſs for their benefit; there is no immorality in writing a play, a poem, or romance, becauſe it is fiction, but great merit, if it is calculated to promote virtue, or to diſcourage vice. The whole of this life is a ſucceſſion of deluſions, kindly impoſed upon us by our Creator, to enable us to ſupport the ſufferings, and carry on the buſineſs of it. The fallacy of each we diſcover in its turn, but never till it has attained its end. It is all mere ſcenery, a beautiful illuſion, in which every object, being placed at a proper diſtance, and ſeen through a falſe medium, appears as it ought, but never as it is. Wealth, honours, and pleaſures, are exhibited in the cleareſt light, to incite our induſtry; but the vanity of their poſſeſſions is hid for a time under a cloud, that we may not ſink into

into ſloth and inactivity. Thus we may be ſaid to believe a lie, that is, what is not true; unexperienced, we believe that the proſperity of this world will make us compleatly happy, that the period of life is of long duration, and that the hour of death is ever at a great diſtance; in every one of which we find ourſelves conſtantly deceived; on which beneficent deception all our enjoyments, hopes, expectations, and purſuits intirely depend. If God, therefore, by means of theſe kind deluſions, diſpenſes undeſerved bleſſings on mankind, why may he not ſometimes inflict ſuch puniſhments upon them, as their offences may have deſerved, by the ſame means, either by his own power, or the operations of intermediate ſpirits? We know that he has given us power to deceive and enſnare, as well as to deſtroy, inferior animals; a power which we daily exerciſe without ſcruple, without arraigning his juſtice or our own. Why then may he not, with equal juſtice, grant the

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ſame power over us, to beings of ſuperior orders?

We may further add, that there are many paſſages, in both the Old and New Teſtament, ſimilar to this before us, which are, in fact, nothing more than modes of expreſſion uſually made uſe of by the writers of thoſe books, who generally impute every event and action, whether good or evil, juſt or unjuſt, to God himſelf, without any reference to ſecond cauſes. Every diſpoſition of men's hearts, and every act proceeding from them, are aſcribed immediately to God; by which nothing more is to be underſtood, than that ſuch were men's hearts, and ſuch things were done. This, in a large and extenſive view, is certainly right, becauſe the great Creator and diſpoſer of all things muſt primarily be the cauſe of all diſpoſitions, actions, and events; becauſe the Firſt Cauſe muſt be the cauſe of every cauſe from whence they can proceed: but how this is conſiſtent with that freewill,

freewill, of which we know and feel we ourſelves are poſſeſſed, is far above the reach of our imperfect comprehenſions; reaſon aſſures us that both are true, and ſcripture every where confirms this concluſion.

JAMES IV. 1.

Ποθεν πολεμοι και μαχαι ἐν ὑμιν; ἐκ ἐνθευθεν, ἐκ των ἡδονων ὑμων των στρατευομενων ἐν τοις μελεσιν ὑμων;

From whence come wars and fighting among you? come they not hence, even of your luſts?

AS war and peace ſo eſſentially affect the morals, as well as the happineſs of mankind, it ſeems extraordinary that the great Author of the Chriſtian religion ſhould have given no directions on ſo important a ſubject. The Apoſtle here decides nothing concerning the lawfulneſs of wars amongſt Chriſtians, but only informs us from whence they proceed, which is from their ungoverned paſſions, anger and revenge, avarice and ambition; nor do we find, in any part of the New Teſtament, that they are either abſolutely allowed or poſitively forbid. This remarkable ſilence, I think, is not difficult to be accounted for; becauſe,

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if Chriſt had encouraged, or even expreſsly permitted, his diſciples to carry on wars and fightings, he would have given the ſanction of divine authority to all the wickedneſs and miſery, which inevitably attend them; and if he had abſolutely forbid them to fight on any occaſion, he muſt have left every country, in which his religion ſhould prevail, a defenceleſs prey to every infidel invader; he prudently, therefore, rather choſe to leave their defence to the operations of their own paſſions and vices, which he knew, notwithſtanding all his pacific precepts, would always be ſufficient for that purpoſe.—But although in this, as well as in many other inſtances, Providence employs the iniquities of men to bring about beneficial ends, this leſſens not their criminality, or juſtifies thoſe who commit them. All the precepts of Chriſt, and every principle of the religion which he taught, are diametrically oppoſite to thoſe of war: theſe require a poor, meek, and humble ſpirit; which thoſe repreſent as infamous

and contemptible: these exhort us to live peaceably with all men; which is certainly incompatible with a state of war: these recommend patience and forbearance under the greatest insults; those the quickest and most violent resentment: these enjoin us to love and serve our enemies; those to destroy them with fire and sword. How at the same time we can serve these two masters, or how their commands can be made consistent with each other, I must leave to some pious and valiant Christian hero to explain.

FINIS.

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